GUITARS, CARS, WATCHES, WINE & THE DELUXE LIFE

GUITAR AFICIONADO

MAGAZINE

VAN HALEN TALKS TONE!

PAGE 70

BIG TIME

MARTIN'S WATCH-INSPIRED MILESTONE GUITAR

RICKY GERVAIS BRENT IS BACK!

MOTORING SPECIAL

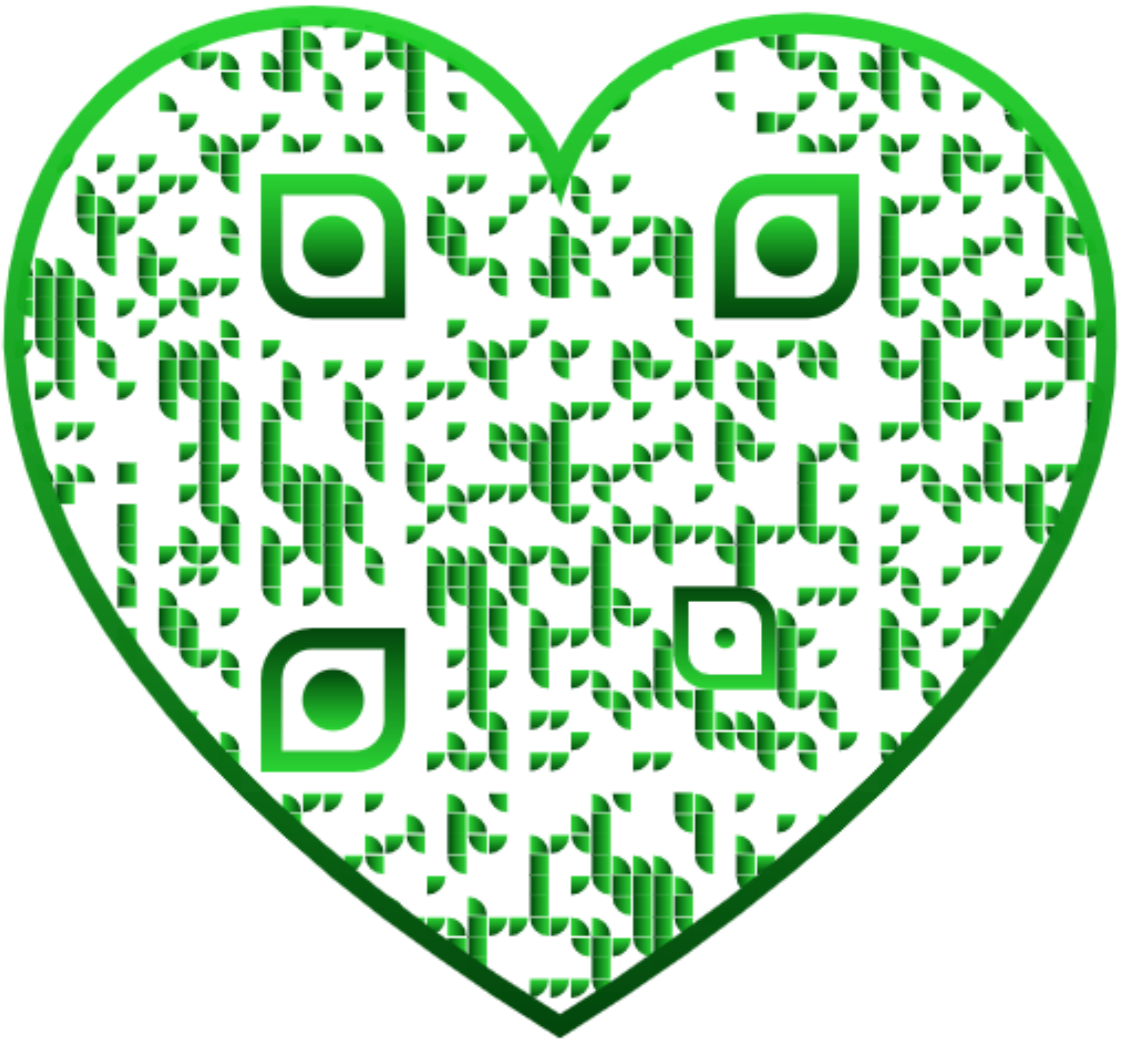
PAT SIMMONS, JOHN OATES, LED ZEP'S McLAREN & BOB MARLEY'S BIMMER

SPIRITS
THE TEQUILA SUNRISE

TRAVEL
ALSACE ADVENTURES

WATCHES
DRIVING STYLE

GUITARS
PRISMA ACCARDO



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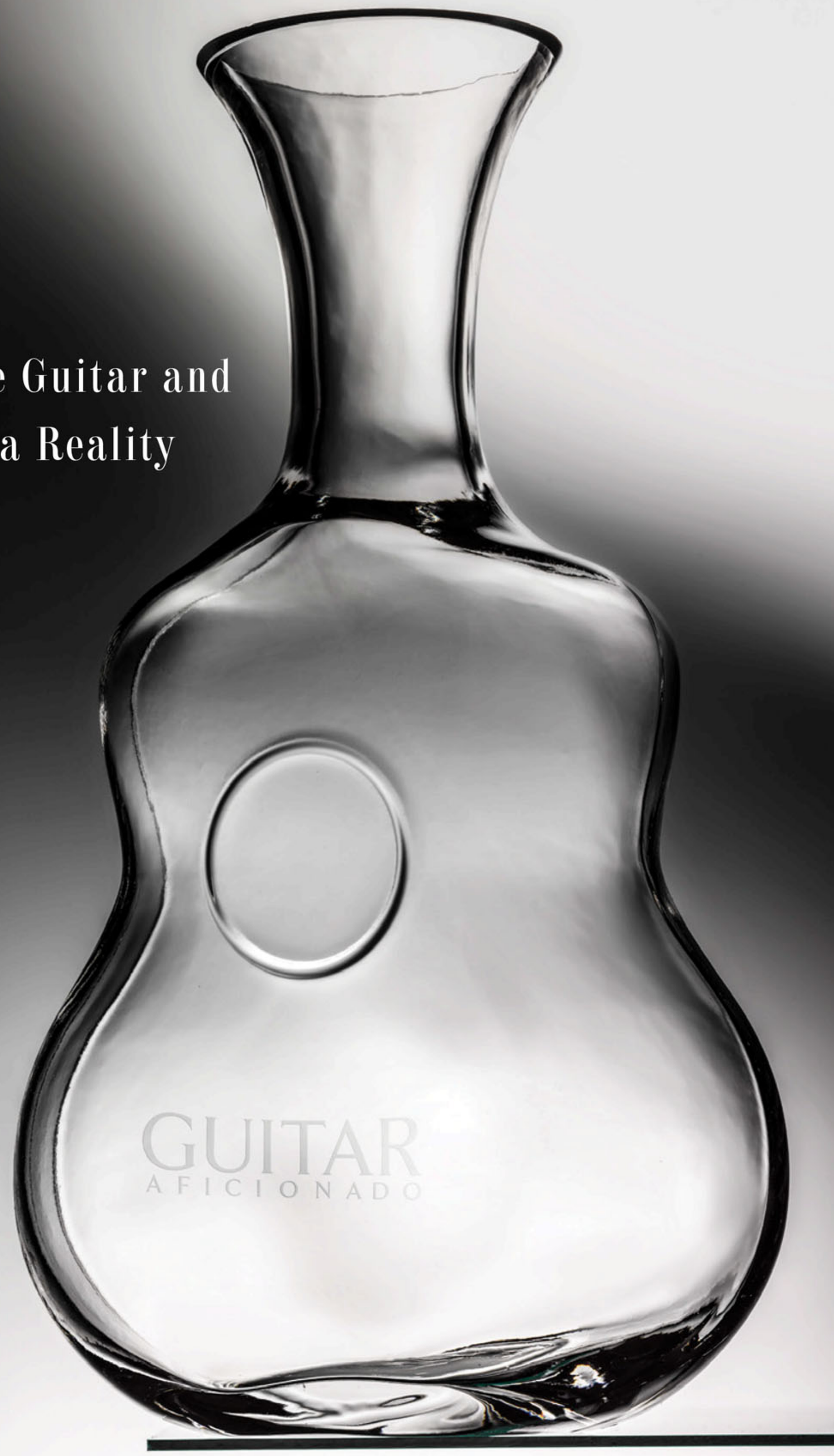
Grape Just Became a Reality



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GUITAR AFICIONADO

MARCH/APRIL • 17 *features* VOL. 9 / NO. 2

28
THE TWO-MILLIONTH MARTIN GUITAR
The legendary guitar maker celebrates another milestone with an exquisite, one-of-a-kind showpiece instrument.
BY CHRIS GILL

36
RICK GERVAIS PLAYS FOR MORE THAN LAUGHS
The actor, comedian, and acoustic guitar aficionado returns as rock-star hopeful David Brent in his new Netflix film.
by DAN EPSTEIN

45
MOTORING
Guitar Aficionado hits the road for its annual celebration of the connection between guitars and wheels.

48
PAT SIMMONS
The Doobie Brothers guitarist and his wife, Cris, cross the U.S. on antique Harley-Davidsons, and bring *GA* along for the ride.
by RICHARD BIENSTOCK

54
JOHN OATES
John Oates reveals his life-long fascination with cars and racing in his captivating autobiography, *Change of Seasons*.
by CHRIS GILL

60
LED ZEPPELIN'S McLAREN
The untold story behind a McLaren M8E/D racecar that the legendary band sponsored for one season in 1974.
by MIKE DALY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELEANOR JANE. GROOMING BY EMMA LEON WITH KIEHL'S AND BUMBLE & BUMBLE. WARDROBE STYLED BY CHERYL KONTEH.

Ricky Gervais with Gretsch Honey Dripper resonator guitar

COVER PHOTO BY - **JOHN STERLING RUTH**

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MARCH/APRIL • 17 *departments* VOL. 9 / NO. 2

16 pg

13

EFFECTS

13 New & Cool Guitar
16 Spirits
18 Watches
20 Best of the Best
22 Events
24 Not for Sale
26 *GA* Recommends

64

COLUMNS

64 **The Fix:** Guitar Care
66 **The Oeno File:** The Wine Market
68 **The Circuit:** Vintage Amps

70

REVIEWS

70 **The Best on Test:** EVH 5150 IIIS EL34 100-watt amp head and 4x12 speaker cabinet
72 **The Ride:** 2017 Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT
74 **Top Gear:** Taylor Guitars 812ce 12-Fret DLX

80

PHOTO FINISH

Reggae icon Bob Marley connects with a BMW.

The Tequila Sunrise

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LETTER *from the* EDITOR

EVEN THOUGH *Guitar Aficionado* has now entered its ninth year of publication, I still come across people who are confused about the concept of a lifestyle magazine based around the guitar. While I think that every issue does a pretty good job of revealing the close relationship between guitars, cars, watches, wine, and other luxury products, in the future I may just offer skeptics a copy of this particular issue and let it speak for itself.

For example, anyone who wonders what watches and guitars have in common need look no further than the spectacular watch-inspired guitar that Martin and RGM Watches collaborated on to commemorate Martin's two-millionth guitar. Both companies are testimony to the incredibly high level of craftsmanship that American-made products still can deliver, despite the claims of the nightly news and politicians.

This issue also includes our annual motoring special section. This time around the section is filled with features about the antique Harley collection belonging to Pat Simmons and his wife, Cris, along with an account of their participation in last year's Motorcycle Cannonball cross-country rally; John Oates' past experiences as a professional race car driver; and the forgotten story of a McLaren racecar once sponsored by Led Zeppelin.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for me was discovering that Ricky Gervais has an incredible singing voice while watching his new film, *David Brent: Life on the Road*. While he's certainly found his calling as a comedian and actor, I could just as easily envision him fronting a band that's much more successful than the one portrayed to hilarious effect in his film. Gervais may downplay his skills as a guitarist, but after speaking with him we discovered that he certainly deserves to be called an "aficionado."

More surprises abound in this issue, but I'll let readers find them for themselves.

CHRIS GILL
Editor-in-Chief

GUITAR AFICIONADO

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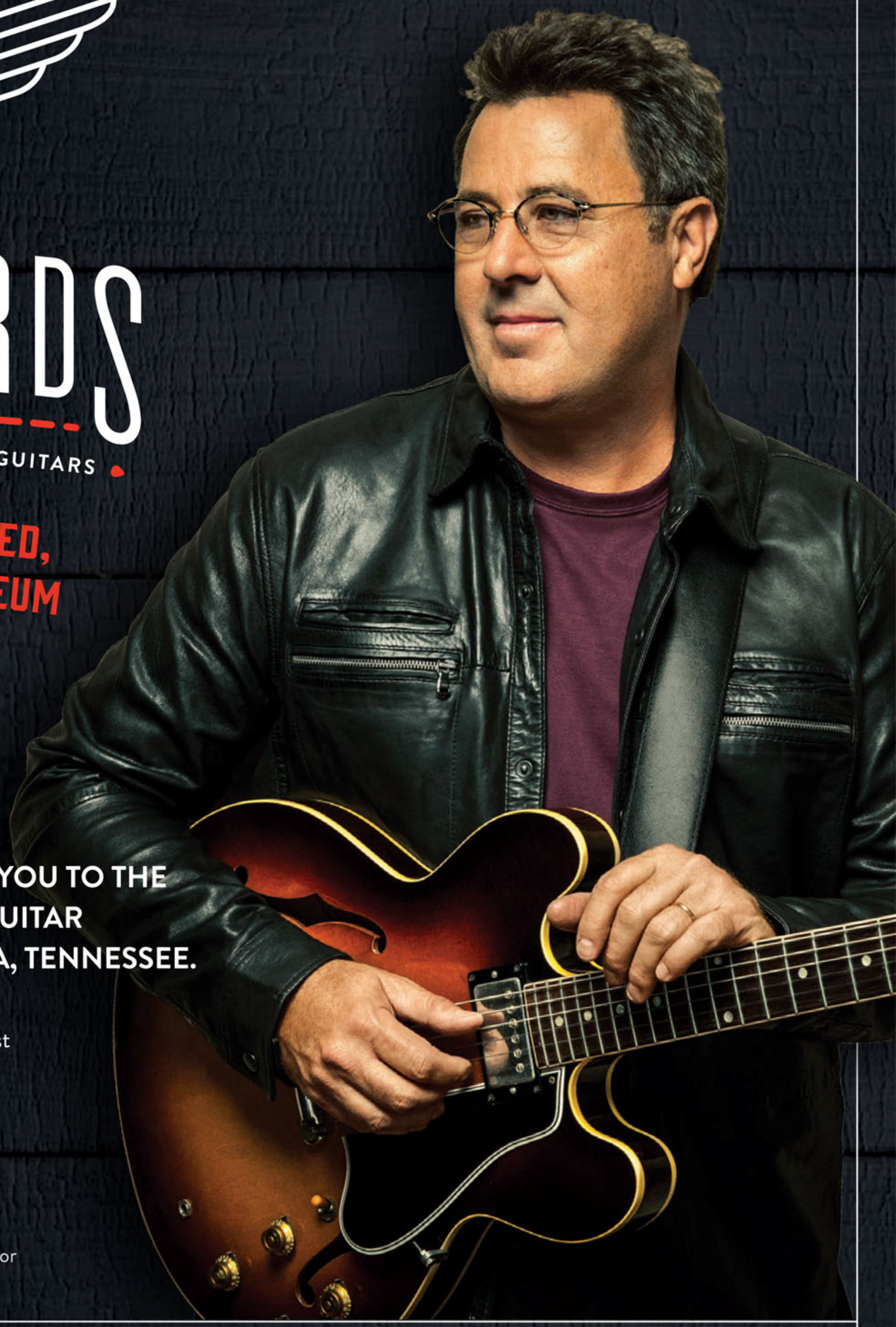

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SPIRITS P.16
WATCHES P.18
BEST OF THE BEST P.20
HAPPENINGS P.22
NOT FOR SALE P.24
GA RECOMMENDS P.26

Effects

NEW + COOL GUITAR

DECKED OUT

PRISMA ACCARDO

{ BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK }

AS A TEENAGER growing up in Southern California in the early 2000s, Nick Pourfard was consumed with skateboarding and playing guitar. But a skateboard accident in 2010 changed the course of his life. "I had built this makeshift skate spot near my parents' house, in San Diego—a total DIY thing," Pourfard, now 25, recalls. "I poured a bunch of concrete, and the next day as I was skating I tore a tendon in my ankle. I couldn't walk for months, and I definitely couldn't skate." Having had some experience in woodworking, Pourfard turned to constructing furniture in a small 10x10 shed behind his parents' house. Eventually, he decided to build a guitar.

"At first I was going to build it out of walnut," he recalls, "but I was so unenthused. I thought, Why would I make something that I could just buy in a store, that already exists?" Instead, he decided to build an instrument that, in his mind, did not exist: a Tele-style electric guitar with a top constructed from the wood of used skateboard decks. "I didn't even know if it would

work," Pourfard says. "But I went for it. And the thing about skate decks is that most people think they're just made of plywood. But 99.9 percent of the time they're actually hard rock maple. As soon as I got the body cut out, I was like, This is it!"

Pourfard continued experimenting with using skateboard decks in instrument builds and eventually launched his own company, Prisma Guitars, which he currently runs out of the garage of his home in San Francisco. He is assisted by two guitar techs and a woodworker, though he estimates that he does as much as 80 percent of the construction of every instrument himself, from routing to sanding to binding. Since starting operations in 2014, Pourfard has produced upward of 100 instruments, each incorporating varying degrees of wood from old skate decks—anywhere from four to, in one case, 50—in their construction. He currently offers eight different Prisma models, including his "favorite design," the Accardo, an example of which is shown here. The guitar's hard rock maple top is constructed from a combination of 30 quartersawn Skate Mental decks ("the company's calling card is boards that are mostly blue and orange," Pourfard says, explaining the Accardo's color scheme), which are glued and compressed together using a "giant custom press" and then bookmatched to create a stunning pattern.

As for how the pattern emerges, "It's just from working the material," Pourfard says. "If you cut a skateboard in half, you'll see seven plies of wood, and the dye runs all the way through. And for our guitars that don't use quartersawn decks, we have a special jig that creates color swirls. Each guitar comes out a little bit different."

Other woods employed in the Accardo

"WHY WOULD I MAKE SOMETHING THAT I COULD JUST BUY IN A STORE, THAT ALREADY EXISTS?"

are alder for the back and flame maple for the bolt-on neck. The rosewood fingerboard sports mother-of-pearl dot inlays, but, Pourfard says, "we occasionally put little skateboard dots of the same striped pattern in the inlays, too." The Prisma triangle logo on the maple headstock is inlaid with that same skateboard stripe pattern as well and is set against a custom blue finish (also seen on the alder back) designed to match the blue lines in the guitar's top. Hardware and features include two McNelly P-90-style pickups; single volume and tone knobs and a three-way selector switch; Gotoh vintage-style staggered tuners; a hand-shaped Graph Tech nut; Emerson Custom electronics; a nitrocellulose finish; and a Mastery vibrato bridge. Further optional offerings include pickup covers and volume and tone knobs that can be fitted with skateboard inlays, as well as a neck constructed entirely from skate decks. "We'll do whatever the customer wants as far as hardware and different design touches," Pourfard says.

Additionally, Pourfard will often employ wood from decks supplied by the customer when constructing a custom instrument. "It adds a real personal touch to the guitar," he says. He also recently built a custom bass for Iron Maiden's Steve Harris, with a skateboard top of "claret and blue" as an homage to the colors of Harris's favorite football club, West Ham United.

Despite the inherent novelty of a guitar built from skateboards, Pourfard is adamant that "there is no gimmick here. I want to make sure I'm making the best guitars possible, with no sacrifices in tone or playability. That comes before everything else. When someone plays a Prisma, I want to hear what they think about it before I even tell them it's made from skateboards. And when I do tell them, they almost don't believe me."

As for what became of the skateboard Pourfard was riding when he injured his ankle on that fateful day in 2010, essentially setting him on his current path as a builder? "That's a good question," he says with a laugh. "I'm assuming it ended up in one of my instruments, because I never throw away any decks. So either it's in one of my guitars or a guitar that someone else purchased from me. Either way, I can say that I'm almost 100 percent positive someone's playing it today."

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HOT STUFF

HOW THE ROLLING STONES POPULARIZED THE TEQUILA SUNRISE.

{ BY CHRIS GILL }

SOME ACCOUNTS TRACE the origins of the Tequila Sunrise cocktail to the Arizona Biltmore Hotel during the Thirties, but the only supporting evidence comes from the Biltmore itself. The Biltmore's recipe also varies from the simple José Cuervo Tequila, orange juice, and grenadine (or Crème de Cassis) mixture that can unquestionably be traced to Bobby Lozoff, who invented the cocktail while he was bartender at the Trident in Sausalito, California, during the early Seventies.

While the Rolling Stones were on a massive world tour in support of *Exile on Main Street* in 1972, Bay Area concert promoter Bill Graham hosted a private party for the Stones at the Trident. When Mick Jagger strutted to the bar to order a Margarita, Lozoff recommended a Tequila Sunrise instead. The Stones loved the drink so much that it became the unofficial cocktail of the tour, which Keith Richards claimed was nicknamed "the cocaine and Tequila Sunrise tour" in his autobiography, *Life*.

Although the Eagles later immortalized the drink with their 1973 hit single "Tequila Sunrise," the Rolling Stones are the actual source of the drink's popularity, as they introduced the cocktail to thousands of tastemakers while partying on their 1972 tour. In celebration of their contribution to the drink's popularity (and the subsequent rise in Tequila sales), Cuervo recently introduced the Special Edition José Cuervo Rolling Stones Tour Pick Especial Silver Tequila.

The Tequila Sunrise is an extremely simple cocktail that benefits most from a base of good ingredients. Using fresh-squeezed orange juice and grenadine made from pomegranate juice and sugar (instead of the widely available cherry-flavored, high-fructose corn syrup version) upgrades the drink significantly.

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{ ANNOTATIONS BY SCOTT HICKEY }

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WHOLE HOG

A JOURNEY TO RICO'S LECHON IN THE PHILIPPINES FOR THE ULTIMATE ROAST PORK.

{ BY MICHAEL COLAMECO }

I REALLY DON'T remember what day it was, but we were in the midst of a 14-day-straight (with no breaks) island-hopping shoot in the Philippines. We rarely stayed in the same hotel for more than one night, and on multiple occasions we awoke before dawn to catch the first plane out, as they were the least likely to be cancelled.

One night after we wrapped at 9 P.M., nearly everyone except me decided to go out for karaoke and drinking. Though the call sheet had us meeting in the lobby at 2:30 A.M., my crew opted to sleep on the flight rather than nap for the few hours prior to our departure. Traveling with us were two New York City–based chefs who run Philippine restaurants in Manhattan: Chef King Phojanakong, of Kuma Inn fame, and Chef Neil Syham, owner of Lumpia Shack. These two professionally trained, CIA (Culinary Institute of America) grads were my sherpas. Both have deep Philippine family roots, having flown back and forth to the islands dozens of times while they were growing up, and often spending entire summers there.

To wrap your head around Philippine cuisine, you first have to realize that the country is comprised of more than 7,000 islands that stretch north to south and are separated from Vietnam, Malaysia, and mainland China by the South China Sea. Not surprisingly, Philippine cuisine has many influences, with a nod to those three countries plus the Spanish (who colonized it), Japan, and even America, which has long had a large naval and military presence in the region. Among the cuisine's offerings are seafood in multiple guises, Paella variations over rice and in stews and grills, stews and rich meat broths loaded with rice and noodles, pork and chicken Adobo-style, and various spring rolls and dumplings.

The centerpiece for larger gatherings and celebrations is often a whole roast pig, known as Lechon, which in fact may be the national dish. The pigs are free range and almost always slaughtered the same day they are cooked. The body cavity is stuffed with garlic, wild scallions, loads of spices, and hot peppers, and a marinade or liquid is poured over the stuffing. Then the belly is sown tight and the pig is slow roasted over a wood fire on a spit for hours until the skin is paper thin and crispy and the meat inside is confit.

The reason why I slept when everyone else partied is because our next destination was the most famous spot for Lechon in all of the Philippines: Rico's in Cebu City (ricoslechon.com). Phojanakong and Syham raved about Rico's, and I didn't want to miss a moment or detail. We filmed there for nearly an entire day, covering the whole process before finally sitting down for a meal at Rico Dionson's brand-new restaurant (Rico's has four branches in the immediate area of Cebu City).

I've had amazing suckling pig slow cooked on a spit over vine trimmings in Portugal and Spain. I've eaten whole hog barbecue from South Carolina to South New Jersey and dined on larger animals cooked the same way outdoors and served over warm polenta in Italy, but the dinner we had that night at Rico's ranks right up there with all those epic memories. As the folks at Michelin say, it's "worth the journey."

New York City–based chef and media personality Michael Colameco is the author of *Mike Colameco's Food Lover's Guide to NYC* and hosts *Colameco's Food Show* on PBS and the nationally syndicated radio program *Weekend Food*.

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A WHEELIE GOOD TIME

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THE PROGRESSIVE INTERNATIONAL Motorcycle Shows (IMS) rolled into Manhattan on December 9, and *Guitar Aficionado* was on hand for the excitement at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. The show is the motorsports industry's most powerful method for engaging qualified buyers, and this year it featured some of the industry's leading manufacturers, including BMW, Can-Am | BRP, Ducati, Harley-Davidson, Honda, Indian, Kawasaki, Royal Enfield, Slingshot, Suzuki, Vanguard, Victory, and Yamaha.

Among the many highlights of this year's event, Vanguard unveiled its new Roadster model, a revolutionary design that features many patented innovations, from its manufacturing process to its modular assembly. Attendees also thrilled to the FMX Stunt Show, featuring Jimmy Fitzpatrick and the Metal Mulisha Fitz Army, who displayed their freestyle motocross talents in the form of flips, whips, heel clickers, and more.

Another attraction of the IMS is the J&P Cycles Ultimate Builder Custom Bike Show, the largest touring custom bike competition in the U.S. In addition, IMS once again displayed classic and retro motorcycles from across the country.

Other show activities included onsite creation of motorcycle-inspired art, displays of innovative industry products, and a marketplace of motorcycle parts, accessories and equipment, as well as coffee and barber, manicure and boot-shine services. Attendees were invited to enter a sweepstakes to win a one-of-a-kind guitar created by PRS Private Stock for GEICO Motorcycle insurance at the *Guitar Aficionado* booth.

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Very few black Les Paul Junior Double Cutways were made in 1959 and even fewer exist today. Collector's Choice #19 is the first Les Paul Junior to be offered in the series and is based on one of the finest of its kind we've seen. It breaths that undeniable P-90 tone and embodies the trademark feel and Spartan aesthetic that emerged from Gibson's intent to offer an entry level model that delivered uncompromised tone and feel. Collector's Choice #19, original serial # 932517 is aged to match the wear and patina of its original counterpart, and is approved by its current owner, and offered in a limited run of up to 300.

NOT FOR SALE

ORVILLE'S PRIDE

1902 ORVILLE GIBSON GUITAR

BUILT BY ORVILLE GIBSON, this historic instrument from the collection at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, reflects a key moment in the story of one of the world's most renowned guitar brands. It dates from May 1902, just five months before the launch of the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Manufacturing Company Ltd., on October 10, 1902, which was the result of a deal between Orville and five businessmen from Kalamazoo, Michigan. This may be one of the very last guitars Orville made as an independent craftsman before his newly formed company made the transition to mass-production techniques.

"The intriguing thing about this guitar is that it has no bracing inside, which is not the case with the earliest Orville guitars," says Arian Sheets, the museum's curator of stringed instruments. "But that is something that was specified in Orville's patent of 1898—that it would not have bracing. And ours is the only one I'm aware of that indeed does not have braces."

While Orville's 1898 patent is for a mandolin, the same basic design principles apply to this 1902 guitar, which resided in the collection of Thomas G. Comeaux until it was acquired by the National Music Museum in 2005. "In the patent, he essentially talks about not having any extra wood or other pieces that inhibit vibration," Sheets explains. "The patent also describes carving the body out of one piece of wood, which is not true of this guitar; the sides are actually made of laminated pieces of walnut. But it appears that he had some kind of machinery to rout out the inside shape, because it's really very regular. I don't see any evidence of hand-tool marks."

The upper layer of the walnut laminate that makes up the sides is continuous with the neck, and the back is a single piece of walnut, 18 inches wide at the lower-body bout. The top is made from two pieces of spruce, with an oval soundhole, a shape that Sheets points out is reminiscent of Neapolitan mandolin soundholes. Abalone binding adorns the body's perimeter, and the soundhole rosette is of abalone with light- and dark-toned hardwoods. The moon-and-star inlay and the paddle-shaped peghead are typical of Orville Gibson's work prior to the formation of the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Manufacturing Company. Also of historic interest is the rectangular printed label inside the body, bearing Orville's likeness enclosed within the arms of a lyre.

—Alan di Perna

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(from left) Van Morrison, Bob Dylan, and Robertson

DANCING WITH THE STARS

THE LAST WALTZ, THE BAND'S ALL-STAR FAREWELL CONCERT, SHINES BRIGHTER THAN EVER IN A 40TH ANNIVERSARY DELUXE EDITION.

The Last Waltz: 40th Anniversary Deluxe Edition
Rhino ($259.98; 4 CD/2 Blu-ray)

OF ALL THE STARS in *The Last Waltz*, Martin Scorsese's 1978 documentary of the Band's extravagant farewell concert, perhaps the most iconic—for guitarists—is Robbie Robertson's 1958 Fender Stratocaster. "When we were preparing to do *The Last Waltz*, I thought, I should do something for the occasion, and I had it bronzed," Robertson told this magazine in 2011. "Just like you would think, it had a more metallic sound." It was also uncomfortably heavy, and after breaking a string on it early in the evening, Robertson set it aside until later, in the second set.

It was just as well. The concert, held at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom on Thanksgiving Day in 1976, was full of guitar luminaries who would each get their moment in the spotlight that night. Among them were Eric Clapton, Muddy Waters, Ronnie Wood, Neil Young, Stephen Stills, Joni Mitchell, and the Band's longtime associate, Bob Dylan.

Even in a decade noteworthy for its stellar live performances, the Band's farewell stands out for its star power. The group's friends turned out for what was meant to be the quintet's last live performance. Earlier that year, keyboardist Richard Manuel had been seriously injured in a pair of back-to-back accidents. Already tired of touring, Robertson urged his band mates to give up the road and stick to the studio. Manuel, drummer Levon Helm, bassist Rick Danko and keyboardist Garth Hudson reluctantly agreed, and Robertson decided they should go all-out for one last show. He asked his friend Scorsese to document the concert for posterity on 16mm film. Scorsese decided to turn it into a full-scale production, complete with seven 35mm cameras.

The result is undeniably one of the greatest concert films of all time. Beyond its vigorous performances of Band staples like "The Weight," "Up on Cripple Creek," and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," *The Last Waltz* delivers priceless moments, such as Clapton, Wood, and Young jamming with the Band, Ringo Starr, and Dr. John, and Robertson taking over without missing a beat when Clapton's strap comes loose after his first solo in "Further On Up the Road."

Rhino's new 40th Anniversary Deluxe Edition includes the film along with audio of the entire concert, plus rehearsals and outtakes. The edition is limited to 2,500 copies and features a replica of the original shooting script from which Scorsese captured one luminous night.

—Christopher Scapelliti

MUSIC

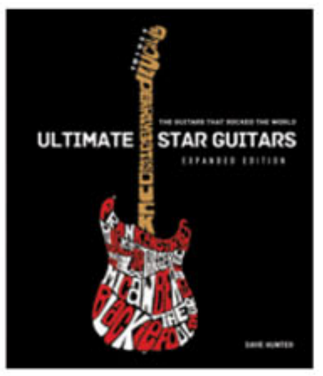
THE DOORS: 50TH ANNIVERSARY DELUXE EDITION BOX SET

The Doors

Elektra Catalog Group ($64.98, 3 CD/1 LP)

The Doors' self-titled debut is a landmark album of the psychedelic era that introduced the world to the group's unique brew of rock, blues, and jazz via the hits "Light My Fire" and "Break on Through (To the Other Side)." Packaged in a 12x12 hardcover book stuffed with rare photos and detailed liner notes, this 50th anniversary deluxe edition includes remastered versions of the original stereo and mono mixes on two CDs, along with an album featuring the original mono mix. The third disc contains a live performance at the Matrix in San Francisco from March 7, 1967, sourced from the recently discovered original tapes.

BOOK



ULTIMATE STAR GUITARS: THE GUITARS THAT ROCKED THE WORLD, EXPANDED EDITION

Dave Hunter

Voyageur Press ($35, 352 pages)

Published in 2010, *Star Guitars* presented an illustrated history of many guitars that defined rock, blues, and other genres, including Eric Clapton's "Blackie" Fender Strat, Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Number One" Strat, Neil Young's early Fifties "Old Black" Gibson Les Paul, and Billy Gibbons' "Pearly Gates." With *Ultimate Star Guitars*, Hunter has expanded his initial offering by adding another 32 iconic guitars from the disparate worlds of country, metal, punk, jazz, and indie rock. As before, he tells the stories behind the guitars, the sessions and tours on which they were used, modifications, and much more.

PHOTO BY UNITED ARTISTS/GETTY IMAGES

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TIME MACHINE

To commemorate the company's two-millionth guitar, C.F. Martin & Co. collaborated with the RGM Watch Company to craft an exquisite, one-of-a-kind showpiece instrument.

by CHRIS GILL

JOHN STERLING RUTH

Several layers of aluminum, brass, pearl, flame maple, and other exotic tonewoods were crafted to resemble a watch movement.

IT TOOK C.F. MARTIN & CO. about 171 years between the company's beginnings in 1833 and 2004 to build its first million guitars. Remarkably, it took the company only 12 years to complete its next million guitars, hitting the two-million mark sometime in late 2016. To celebrate this impressive milestone, Martin built a commemorative, one-of-a-kind showpiece instrument like it did to celebrate the company's first millionth and 1.5-millionth guitars. ¶ "My ancestors would be amazed," says C.F. "Chris" Martin IV, the CEO of Martin Guitars. "Martin has been around for 184 years, and our guitars are as popular and successful as they've ever been. Some people are predicting gloom and doom for the guitar's future, but they forget just how long the guitar has lasted. The dreadnought just had its 100th anniversary, for example. There aren't many products from 100 years ago that are still popular, but the guitar has defied the odds."

The pace of Martin's production has increased so rapidly that the milestone approached almost before the company completed its commemorative two-millionth guitar. Work on the instrument started in 2013, but the finishing touches on the guitar were not completed until October 2016. The guitar made its public debut at the 2017 Winter NAMM convention in Anaheim in January.

Whereas Martin's previous one- and 1.5-millionth guitars featured the work of independent craftsmen like inlay artists Larry Robinson and Harvey Leach and engravers Bob Hergert and Tara Mitchell, the two-millionth guitar was crafted with input from an entirely different sort of artisan: watchmaker Roland Murphy of the RGM Watch Company of Mount Joy, Pennsylvania. RGM is truly America's premier watch company, handcrafting and hand finishing beautiful heirloom-quality watches in a small workshop that employs only 11 craftsmen.

"About five years ago I went on a tour of the Martin factory," Murphy recalls. "I saw that they do a lot of custom work, and I thought it would be cool to embellish a guitar with *guilloché*, which is an engine-turning process where geometric patterns are cut into rotating metal surfaces with a stationary cutting tool. We use that process for many of our watches, and it's really a lost art. I contacted Martin, got Tim Teel's name and email address, and sent him some photos of our work. He was interested, but he didn't have anything particular in mind at the time."

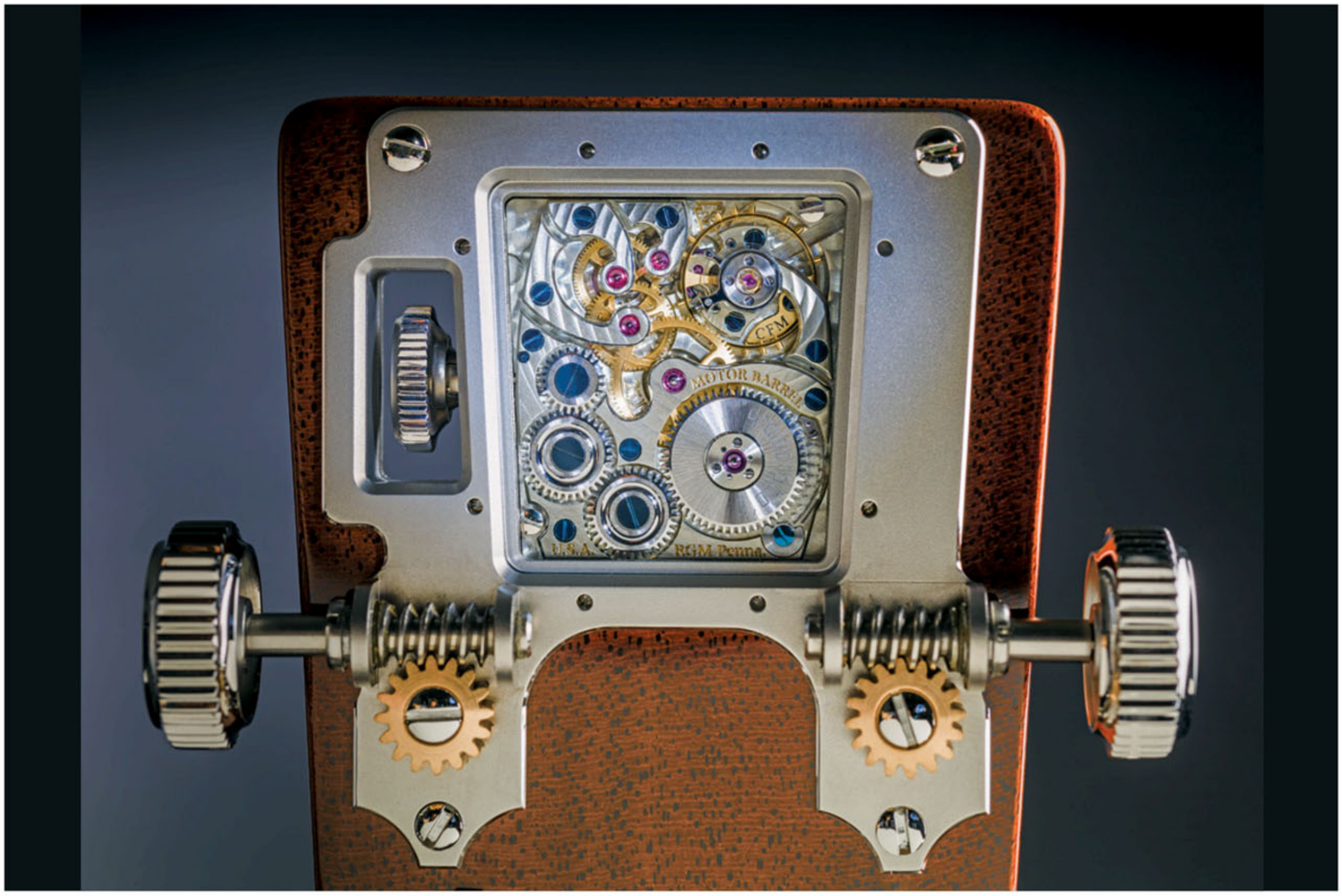
Two years passed and Murphy still hadn't heard anything back from Martin. Then one day, Martin Custom Shop director Scott Sasser decided that he wanted to build a special showpiece guitar and he discussed ideas with Teel, who is Martin's director of instrument design.

"Scott mentioned that he always wanted to do a watch-themed guitar," Teel recalls. "We talked about how we could do that. Around the same time, we realized that we were going to need to come up with an idea for Martin's two-millionth guitar, which was quickly approaching. We put two and two together and realized that the watch idea was perfect for that guitar. Once Chris Martin approved of the idea, we hired Robert Goetzl to do some concept drawings. Scott mentioned that he knew of a watchmaking company in Lancaster called RGM watches. I told Scott that they had reached out to me, so I reached out to Roland, who invited us to his workshop. When Scott and I visited them we were blown away by his operation."

Once RGM was brought into the creative process, the overall idea developed quickly. Murphy made suggestions for and corrections to the graphic designs for the top, back, and neck, which were inspired by a watch movement.

"At some point we recommended using our Caliber 20 watch as the inspiration for the guitar," Murphy says. "Since we already had CAD files for the Caliber 20's movement, that made it easier to come up with a design that was an accurate depiction of a watch movement. We also thought it would be cool to embed a real working watch into the headstock."

GUITAR: JOHN STERLING RUTH; MARTIN & MURPHY: ZACHARY HARTZELL



(clockwise from top) A working watch based on the RGM Caliber 20 is mounted in the headstock; flamed koa surrounds the top to resemble a watch bezel; Roland Murphy (left) and Chris Martin at RGM.

Front and back views reveal the intricate detail of the watch-inspired design.

JOHN STERLING RUTH

That decision led to yet another challenge: how to fit the tuners and the watch into the headstock without making the headstock overly long and unattractive. The solution involved building a special mounting plate that had the tuners for the G and D strings built into it to save space. All of the tuners were custom built for the guitar, and as a literal crowning touch the tuner buttons were carved from stainless steel to resemble watch crowns and decorated with rose gold inserts with *guilloché* engraving.

"The watch is based on our Caliber 20 and has many of the same parts," Murphy says. "However, we decided to make it wedge-shaped, like the headstock, so we changed the shape of the movement. It has a precise moon phase, and the seconds are displayed on a small disc up around the one o'clock area. It's a manual-wind movement that is entirely hand built and hand finished. It's very special."

In addition to the headstock-mounted watch and tuners, RGM also made a removable titanium pickguard/soundhole cover featuring engine-turned engraving as well as an engine-turned titanium plate inlaid in the top for the graphic depiction of a moon phase and an engine-turned rosette.

The gears inlaid in the top, back, and fingerboard are made of various metals, pearl, and exotic woods. "Pearl Works helped us get those elements machined and cut," Teel says. "Aluminum was an easy choice for some of the gears because we've used aluminum for guitars before, and I knew how it was going to react tonally. We also used brass for some pieces. The most challenging part was the blue screws. We tried several different techniques to get that look, and we ended up using heat-treated stainless steel to get that blue color. Roland did that for us, and it was a difficult process."

Most remarkably of all, the movement design is layered to give the graphics a three-dimensional appearance. "The entire top is only 1/8-inch thick, and the back is less that 1/8-inch thick," Teel explains. "The challenge was how to layer the gears to give the whole thing some depth and make it look deeper than it actually is. Once we laid all the gearing in place, we poured a very specific type of epoxy that is water clear over it to keep everything in place. It was difficult to pour without getting any air bubbles or dust in it. It took us six months to figure out how to do that."

Other notable features of the showpiece guitar include its Engelmann spruce top with heavy bear-claw figuring and the flamed koa inlays that surround the top to mimic a watch's bezel.

While the showpiece guitar is a unique instrument that will find its permanent home in the museum at the Martin factory in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, Martin is also producing a very limited number of D-200 Deluxe

COURTESY HAL LEONARD

PAPER CHASE

***The C.F. Martin Archives* offers a new perspective on Martin's history.**

For most of his career at Martin, Dick Boak has collected numerous pieces of ephemera related to the company's history for its archives. In collaboration with Jim Washburn, he has selected dozens of important and fascinating photographs and documents for their new book, *The C.F. Martin Archives—A Scrapbook of Treasures from the World's Foremost Acoustic Guitar Maker* (Hal Leonard).

While the pages are filled with fascinating new details about the company's history as revealed by these items, photos, and documents, the reproductions of various items contained in pockets throughout the book allow readers to become truly immersed in the story. Highlight items include a letter from Gene Autry, early catalogs, a silk promotional banner, and a humble postcard announcing the introduction of the game-changing OM-28 model.

"The archives are a moving target," Boak says. "Every year we add more details to the company's story, so this book is just scratching the surface of what we have. I think that the book provides a unique glimpse into Martin's past, and I hope that it gives readers a new appreciation of how Martin became the company that it is today." —**CHRIS GILL**

(top) Rose-gold inserts adorn the crown-shaped tuner buttons; (bottom) The soundhole cover and rosette are decorated with exquisite guilloché engraving.

guitars featuring many of the same design elements.

"It's going to be an unbelievably rare and collectible guitar," says Martin special projects director Dick Boak. "It's a work of art and a piece of history. When we made the one-millionth guitar, we also offered the D-100, and we made only 50 of those. It took us about 10 years to sell them all. I don't know how many D-200 guitars we are going to make, but if somebody wants one, they can order one from us."

While the design for the top and back of the D-200 is not as intricately detailed, the fingerboard on the D-200 and the showpiece guitar are essentially identical. The D-200's top will feature an inlaid graphic gear design on an ebony pickguard that is also inlaid into the top, and it has similar flamed koa inserts surrounding the top. Instead of having a watch embedded in the headstock, the vertical C.F. Martin logo is inlaid in aluminum surrounded by abalone pearl.

RGM is also making a special watch that is only available with the D-200 Deluxe. "We designed something classic that has a hint of a guitar feel," Murphy says. "We designed a dial with a larger hole in the middle to resemble a guitar's soundhole, and we did engine-turning on the solid-silver dial. It comes in a leather watch box that goes into a special pocket built into the case."

"Even the case is a significant part of the package," Teel adds. "It's a Zero Manufacturing case, which is the kind of case that you see in James Bond films. It's molded aluminum and has a hygrometer built into the side of the case. It's very protective but also attractive in its own right."

While this magazine has frequently written about the relationship between watches and guitars, this collaboration between Martin and RGM transcended the usual similarities. Both companies are family owned, both are from Pennsylvania, and both emphasize an extremely high level of handcraftsmanship and precision. Even the RGM logo resembles the vertical C.F. Martin logo featured on the D-45.

"I think that most people will appreciate the craftsmanship as well as the risk and challenge of building something like this," Murphy says. "The commitment that Martin dedicated to this project was inspiring. Very few companies would commit to a project like this where you don't know how much it is going to cost you and you're willing to let people be craftsmen and do things the best way possible. Most companies are only concerned with how much something is going to cost. Martin didn't limit us that way, and that is so rare. They only wanted us to make the guitar as best as we could." GA

JOHN STERLING RUTH

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COMEDY OF ERRORS

Actor, comedian, and acoustic guitar aficionado **Ricky Gervais** finds the humor and pathos in failed rock star dreams with *David Brent: Life on the Road*, his new Netflix film.

BY **DAN EPSTEIN**
PHOTOGRAPHED BY **ELEANOR JANE**
GUITARS COURTESY OF
FENDER EMEA

Ricky's collection is mostly acoustic, including a Gretsch Jim Dandy model.

GROOMING BY EMMA LEON WITH KIEHL'S AND BUMBLE & BUMBLE. WARDROBE STYLED BY CHERYL KONTEH.

GRETSCH

IN ALL MY YEARS AS A MUSICIAN AND A JOURNALIST, I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE WHO KNOWS MORE ABOUT GUITARS THAN RICKY GERVAIS.

At least, that's what Ricky Gervais wants me to tell you. "Make it look really good for me," he says, gleefully punctuating his instructions with a manic cackle. "Say, 'In fact, if I worked for a guitar company, I'd send him a free one. Immediately.'"

All joking aside, the Emmy- and Golden Globes–winning English comedian/writer/actor/director—and creator and star of such TV comedies as *Derek*, *Extras*, and the original British version of *The Office*—readily admits that he's "no expert" when it comes to the playing or collecting of guitars. Which is why he feels a tad conflicted about posing with several exquisite axes for our *Guitar Aficionado* photo shoot.

"My worry is that I'm a fat little comedian," he says. "Me trying to pose like I think I'm Eddie Van Halen would not go well, so I went for mucking around a little bit instead.

"But I know guitarists take guitars very seriously," he continues, "so it would be quite easy for your readers to see me having fun with these beautiful instruments and go, 'How *dare* he? How dare he treat a White Falcon like that? You fat little idiot!'"

Rest assured, however, that Gervais' affection for guitars is very real indeed, even if he's not exactly your classic guitar hero. "Guitars are beautiful objects to me, as well as something to make music on," he says. "Apart from its status and how cool and important it is in the history of music, a guitar is a piece of art—it's sculpture as a functional object." A guitar player himself for more than 40 years now, Gervais utilizes his picking and songwriting chops to excellent effect in *David Brent: Life on the Road*, a Netflix original film that makes its U.S. debut this February.

The mockumentary film follows David Brent, the socially awkward main character Gervais portrayed on *The Office*, as he makes a last-ditch bid for rock stardom. Armed with well-meaning but cringe-worthy songs like "Free Love Freeway," "Native American," and "Don't Make Fun of the Disableds," Brent, who now makes his living as a sales rep for a lavatory-supplies firm in the suburban

(left) Gervais "mucking around a bit" with a Gretsch Black Falcon and (right) a Charvel Pro-Mod So-Cal Style 1; (previous page) with a Gretsch Honey Dripper resonator guitar

With a Gretsch 6120

town of Slough, cashes in his retirement savings and hits the road with a band of high-priced sidemen (including Razorlight's Andy Burrows) for a two-week tour of small venues primarily located within a short driving distance of Brent's apartment. At once agonizingly uncomfortable and screamingly funny, *David Brent: Life on the Road* also makes some pointed observations about our culture's current obsession with fame, as well as the absurd lengths that people will often go in its pursuit.

"David Brent is a character in the classic British comedy tradition, an ordinary guy trying to do something he's not fit to do," Gervais explains. "In *The Office*, he wanted to be loved, he wanted to be thought of as a great philosopher. He wanted his life to turn out better and get these great rewards, and he thought appearing in a docu-series would make that happen.

"But people think fame is a shortcut to happiness," he continues, "and it's just not. And David Brent, now he's even sadder. He's 55, he's a sales rep, and of course he still wants to be famous. He sees people like Susan Boyle making millions, and he thinks, I could do that! He's putting a band together, he's writing songs. But he's wrong for that world, because no real A&R man is going to come along and sign a 55-year-old tampon rep," he says, laughing. "He's unlucky, and he's been sold a lie, like most people have, and he's hemorrhaging money to achieve his dream with this vanity project. So there are all these conflicting emotions to it."

Gervais cites the 2008 rockumentary *Anvil: The Story of Anvil* as a primary touchstone for *David Brent: Life on the Road*. "I find that documentary so incredibly sad and sweet and uplifting and depressing, all at the same time," he says. "You sort of watch it as a smug voyeur, and then comes the bit where the sister lends [*Anvil frontman "Lips" Kudlow*] 15 grand of her life savings, and she just starts crying because she knows she's never going to see it again.

"It's so human, and that's what I've tried to do with Brent. Instead of maybe laughing at his ambition, we start going, 'You know what? It *is* his money, he *is* happy doing it. Good luck to him!' And he *is* a bit of a prat, but by today's standards he's not as bad as some people. At least he's not a nasty person. He's not a bully. And you sort of want to say to people who snigger at these people who may be delusional, 'Fuck you—at least *they're* trying. You're not!'"

Gervais' own musical ambitions took root while he was growing up in the Thames Valley

In six months, I could bang out a Dylan tune. What an insult to Dylan!

town of Reading. "I was 13, 14, so that would put it about 1974. And there was only one instrument you wanted to play in 1974," he says. "It wasn't like, 'Mother, I think the trombone is going to be the instrument of the future!'"

While the British airwaves of the day were filled with the glam-rock sounds of Slade, Queen, and the Sweet, Gervais had zero interest in electric guitars. "I had older brothers and sisters, so I grew up hearing things like Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, and Neil Young," he explains. "The first thing I really loved that was 'mine,' that I discovered and wasn't a hand-me-down, was Cat Stevens. So folk was the thing. I loved rock, but I wanted an acoustic. I wanted to play guitar to write songs. That's all I wanted to be able to do. I didn't want to be a great player or even play onstage."

Gervais' first guitar was a no-brand acoustic, purchased off the wall of a local shop for the princely sum of 10 pounds. "It was probably the cheapest guitar made on planet Earth, but I didn't know any different," he recalls. "It probably made me work a bit harder, which was good. I would sneak up to my room and try to teach myself to play the guitar, and I couldn't hold the chords down. I'd go, 'You *fucker!*' I'd be hitting it—but gently, because I didn't want to damage it," he says with a laugh. "So I'm like this angry maniac who can't fucking play this chord, but I'm taking out my anger very carefully, because I didn't want to scratch it!"

Undeterred, he pressed on. "I got okay pretty fast. In six months, I could bang out a Dylan tune." He cackles. "What an insult to Dylan!" Despite his original disinterest in performing, Gervais eventually found his way to the stage. A brief stint in the early Eighties as the singer of the synth-pop duo Seona Dancing resulted in a couple of minor U.K. hits, but subsequent attempts at fronting more rock-oriented bands went nowhere. Gervais would ultimately replicate one particularly dispiriting experience from his struggling-musician days in a scene of *David Brent: Life on the Road*.

"It was 1986, and we played a pub called the Bull and Gate in Kentish Town in London," he recalls. "We did the soundcheck, and the sound guy said, 'You might as well stay on, lads. You're on now.' I went, 'When are they opening the doors?' And he went, 'They're open. No one's come through to see you.' I turned to the band, who looked crestfallen—another pointless gig, right? And I said, 'Let's treat it like a free rehearsal!' Like, now I'm trying to sell this as a *positive* to these guys," he says, laughing. "So we did a set to the sound engineer, and no one else, in a room above a pub!"

The focus of his career has long since shifted to radio, television, and film, but Gervais still occasionally adds guitars to his collection. "Well, saying 'collection' would give people the wrong idea," he says. "I'm more of a hoarder than a collector. I've got 10 guitars, and I play them all. I don't keep them locked away in their cases. Every guitar I've got, it's got a thing about it that's the best thing out of all of them, but they're not all in *one* guitar, d'you know what I mean? I just can't throw one away!"

Gervais' favorite guitars include a Martin 00-15M, which he plays in his *Learn Guitar with*

Gervais with an EVH Star. "Me posing like I think I'm Eddie Van Halen would not go well."

David Brent videos on YouTube—"It's just beautiful, and I play that one all the time," he says—as well as a pair of Blueridge acoustics, a Gretsch Jim Dandy flattop, a small Taylor, "a sunburst Gibson acoustic from the Seventies or Eighties," and a Sigma 12-string that "makes everything I play sound like Tom Petty." The lone electric in his collection is a vintage Fifties Les Paul given to him by Christopher Guest, who'd used it in *This Is Spinal Tap*.

"You know the scene where they're doing 'Give Me Some Money' live at sound check, when Jeanine comes in? It's the same guitar that [*Nigel Tufnel*] is playing then. Christopher bought it in the Seventies, and he gave it to me for my 50th birthday," Gervais says. "By itself, it's already a beautiful guitar. And then for it to be in my favorite comedy film and given to me by a hero and friend, this guitar keeps going up in value for me, d'you know what I mean? That's the only one I don't play. That's the one I get out and look at!"

One of the most striking things about the soundtrack album of *David Brent: Life on the Road* is just how legitimately good its songs are. Divorced from their context and scrubbed of their jokes, tracks like the Springsteen-esque "Life on the Road," the alt-rock anthem "Electricity" (a Coldplay rip-off so blatant that even Chris Martin couldn't resist adding backing vocals), and the lilting folk ballad "Lady Gypsy" (in which a teenaged Brent loses his virginity while haggling with a Roma woman) might actually, one imagines, connect with an older rock audience.

"That's the funny thing about this album," Gervais says. "They're not comedy songs like Monty Python—it's the back story that's funny. 'Free Love Freeway' is a cracking tune, you know? But when you realize it's about crossing America and picking up chicks, and it's being sung by a 55-year-old tampon rep who has never been to America and is awful around women, it suddenly becomes funny. The joke isn't that it's played badly or

This sounds like Radiohead—why have I got to ruin it now by singing about Slough?

written badly; the comedy is coming from the fact that this is the wrong guy for the job, but everything else is good. In fact, at some point during the recording, when you're laying it down and the silly lyrics aren't kicking in yet, you're thinking, 'Aw, why aren't we doing this seriously? This sounds like Radiohead—why have I got to ruin it now by singing about Slough?'"

Still, don't expect to hear a "real" Ricky Gervais album anytime soon. "I don't really write for myself anymore," he explains. "I've always snuck in a song in different contexts. I wrote a song with David Bowie for *Extras*." (Bowie appeared on a 2006 episode where he sang the tune, "The Little Fat Man with the Pug-Nosed Face," in tribute to Gervais' character.) "I wrote a song for *The Simpsons*; I wrote a song for Elmo [*for an appearance on* Sesame Street]. I get it out of my system, but there usually is a narrative around it, as opposed to me sitting down at the piano on a chat show going, 'Here's a song I wrote about world hunger,'" he says, and laughs. "When I release an album called *Ricky Gervais Sings the Ballads*, shoot me. That's when I've lost it!" GA

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2017 GA MOTORING

PHOTOGRAPH BY TRAVIS SHINN

ROCKIN' DOWN THE HIGH WAY

When Doobie Brothers guitarist **PAT SIMMONS AND HIS WIFE, CRIS** set out to cross the U.S. on antique Harley-Davidsons, they brought *Guitar Aficionado* along for the ride.

Cris Simmons on the Cannonball's final stretch.

2017

GA MOTORING

P47

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK || **PHOTOGRAPHY BY** TRAVIS SHINN

FOR MORE THAN

40 YEARS, PAT SIMMONS AND THE DOOBIE BROTHERS have traveled the world to bring their songs to music-loving audiences. The group racked up hit after hit during their mid-Seventies-to–early Eighties heyday, including tracks like "Black Water," "What a Fool Believes," and "Rockin' Down the Highway."

But recently, Simmons was rockin' down the highway in a different sort of way, piloting a more than 100-year-old Harley Davidson on a cross-country trek known as the Motorcycle Cannonball.

The event saw a select group of enthusiasts (roughly 120 motorcyclists from all over the world) cover more than 3,000 miles—a stretch that began in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and ended in Carlsbad, California—over 16 days in September, riding, per Cannonball tradition, on vintage bikes. But this year, the fourth staging of the Motorcycle Cannonball since its debut run in 2010, organizers added an extra wrinkle to the challenge: In honor of the event's namesake, Erwin George "Cannon Ball" Baker, who completed a coast-to-coast journey on an Indian motorcycle just over 100 years ago, participants this year could ride only on pre-1916 antique bikes.

Simmons has ridden motorcycles since the early Seventies, and he has a particular affinity for vintage models. "The mechanical aspect of riding old bikes is the fun part of it to me," he says, calling into *Guitar Aficionado* from a Doobies Brothers tour stop in New Jersey a few weeks after the end of the Cannonball. "The hand shifting, the foot clutch…you feel a little more a part of what's going on with the machine. On a modern bike you're sort of at the mercy of whatever you're riding. If something goes wrong you have to stop at the Harley shop and have somebody help you sort it out. But on these old bikes, if there's something you need to adjust, you can hop off, reach in your saddlebag, grab a wrench, and adjust something. That's a good feeling to be able to do that."

Simmons is not alone in his love for old motorcycles—his wife, Cris Sommer-Simmons, who competed in the Cannonball alongside him, shares the same sentiments. A lifelong motorcyclist, Sommer-Simmons is a celebrated rider, journalist, and historian. Her many accomplishments include founding and editing the magazine *Harley Women*, authoring the 2009 tome *The American Motorcycle Girls 1900–1950*, and being inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame. At this year's Cannonball, Cris, who rode a 1915 Harley-Davidson Model 11-J she nicknamed Effie ("after Effie Hotchkiss, the first woman to ride a motorcycle across the United States in 1916," she says), was the only female to complete the entire course. Pat did not fare as well riding a 1914 Harley two-speed nicknamed "Vinnie" ("after a buddy of mine who's a unique individual," he says with a laugh).

"We were on our way to Cape Girardeau in Missouri," he recalls. "It was a rainy day and my bike started giving me a little problem on the road. I rode another 100 miles or so, but then it just came apart. Basically the engine stopped. Parts had come off and lodged in the gear chain, broke a number of my gears, and basically froze the engine. It wouldn't even turn over at that point. It was nothing I could have predicted. When you're on a 102-year-old bike, you just never know what can happen."

According to Cris, riding antique bikes requires a unique skill set. "It's a totally different way of riding than with the newer bikes," she says. "It's a little harder and there's a lot more to think about. All the parts are old, and they don't always work. During the Cannonball, you'd see a lot of riders pulled over on the side of the road during the day, working on their bikes."

For those who made it to the checkpoint destination each evening, after a good eight hours or so on the road, it was time for repairs and preventative maintenance. "I'd usually pull in by four or five P.M.," Cris says, "and we'd be done working on my bike around nine or so. Some people would have to pull their whole motor out every night. These bikes weren't made to go 200 or 300 miles a day. When they were built 100 years ago there were no highways or paved roads. You weren't riding very far or that fast."

How fast were participants moving on those bikes? "I'd cruise at about 48 [*mph*], comfortably," Cris continues. But, adds Pat, "As far as stopping, you have limited braking power. So you have to be able to slow down very gradually—you don't want to have to do any panic stops, so you have to be aware of your surroundings all the time. That's a fatiguing element of these bikes. There's a mental challenge as well as a physical challenge. But I love it."

For Simmons, motorcycles and music remained twin passions for

Pat and Cris Simmons with "Effie," a 1915 Harley-Davidson Model 11-J

much of his life. Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, he recalls that, "around 1970, I had a friend who rode an older Harley, and he really got me excited about motorcycles. Another friend told me of this guy who had a bike in his garage, and if I went up to his house I could have it. But when I got there, it was all in pieces! I brought it home and got a manual and was able to put it back together. I rode that bike for a couple of years. Later on, I bought myself a more dependable bike—a Harley Super Glide—after I started making a little money with the band."

"The band," of course, is the Doobie Brothers, which Simmons helped to launch in 1970. In an interesting parallel to Simmons' budding motorcycle passion, the hard-rocking unit spent its earliest years in biker bars around Northern California, including at a rough-and-tumble saloon in the Santa Cruz mountains called the Chateau Liberté.

"We really had a following among the bikers, but probably just because many of the places we played happened to be places where motorcyclists—

"WE CAME FROM THAT 'CHUCK BERRY' SCHOOL OF SONGWRITING, WHERE YOU'RE CELEBRATING FREEDOM, CARS, BIKES, GIRLS."

—PAT SIMMONS

mostly Hells Angels and Gypsy Jokers guys—hung out," Pat says. "They would also come to the house where we rehearsed [*in San Jose*], and I used to eat breakfast at this restaurant in Los Gatos with some friends who were Hells Angels. Because most of us in the band rode, we just sort of hit it off with those guys."

While the Doobie Brothers for the most part never wrote songs about motorcycles specifically, in the Seventies they became known as purveyors of a sort of American "road rock" vibe, typified by upbeat riff-rockers like "China Grove," "Long Train Runnin'," and "Rockin' Down the Highway." Did Simmons see a connection between the open road and his band's music? "For sure," he says. "We were aware of that relationship. We came from that Chuck Berry school of songwriting, where you're celebrating freedom, cars, bikes, girls." He laughs. "The teenage dream, you know?"

Throughout the Seventies, the Doobie Brothers' massive success enabled Simmons to indulge in his passion for motorcycles, providing him funds to buy rare bikes and allowing him to travel the country and seek them out. "I did a lot of purchasing while we were on tour," he says. "Those were the years before the Internet, so a lot of stuff was still out there in the marketplace. We'd come into a town, and I'd pick up a newspaper and flip to the want ads. Often there would be, say, an old Indian or Matchless for sale. I'd go check it out, and if it looked promising I'd buy it. Then I'd have our semi driver pick it up, we'd throw it in front of all the equipment, and I would take it home. I did that for years, buying all vintage."

Later on, toward the end of the Seventies, he continues, "one of my friends and I opened up a motorcycle shop for parts and accessories [*Classic Motorcycles of Santa Cruz*]. That's when I really got into the old bikes. I bought a couple of really old Harley JDs and put them on the floor of the shop just for people to look at when they came in. I fell in love with the whole historical aspects of motorcycles. Whenever the Doobie Brothers weren't on tour and I was in town, I'd be at the shop working on bikes, tearing stuff apart and putting it back together."

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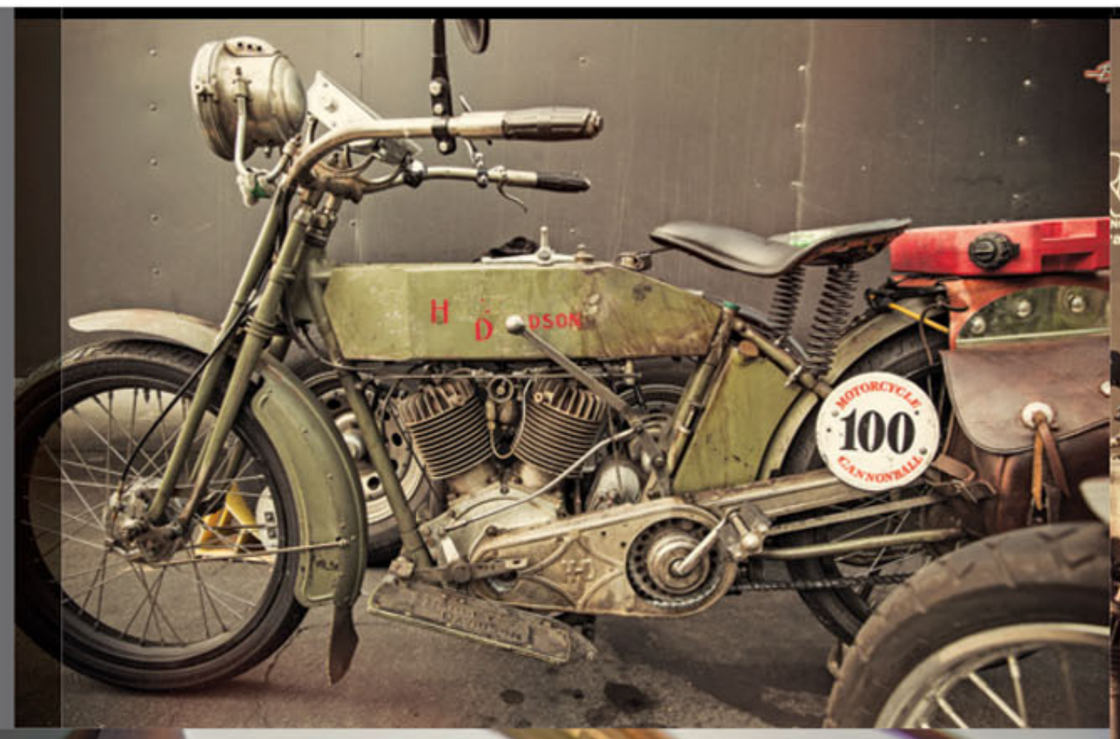

(clockwise from top left) "Vinnie," Pat's 1914 Harley two-speed; Pat with various antique Harleys; an antique Norton that participated in the event; Simmons checks the day's directions.

Playing music with the Doobies Brothers, as well as his love of motorcycles, eventually led Simmons to Cris. In 1989, he and the band were playing a benefit concert in South Dakota for Harley-Davidson's Muscular Dystrophy Association charity, and, he recalls, "the night before the show we had a press conference at a hotel, with a lot of writers from different magazines. Cris was there with *Harley Women*. We were introduced by a mutual friend and hit it off."

Was Cris also a Doobies fan?

"Kinda," she says with a laugh. "But it was motorcycles that really brought us together. We were very kindred spirits, and we still are."

These days, Pat and Cris indulge their passion for vintage motorcycles together. According to Cris, they have a reasonable collection of antique bikes—"some old ones, some rare ones. Pat has a '28 Harley in addition to his '14. I have Essie, though she's going to be retired after this recent Cannonball. And there are some old Indians, like a 1905, a 1911, a '16. We just love anything to do with old bikes. We collect old motorcycle literature, old motorcycle magazines from the teens—anything historical."

It is the historical aspect of motorcycles, as well as the opportunity to witness that history come alive, that makes the Cannonball so appealing to them. "Seeing an old motorcycle in a museum or a book is one thing," Cris says. "But to see it running, to hear the engine, is pretty amazing. It's such a different niche in the motorcycle community."

"It's a cross-section of Americana that few people get to experience," Pat adds. "A very unique blend of individuals are into it. There's a kinship among the vintage biker people, and there's this mythology around these old bikes that is kind of surreal. It's such an esoteric part of our American heritage and history. It's something that deserves to be celebrated." GA

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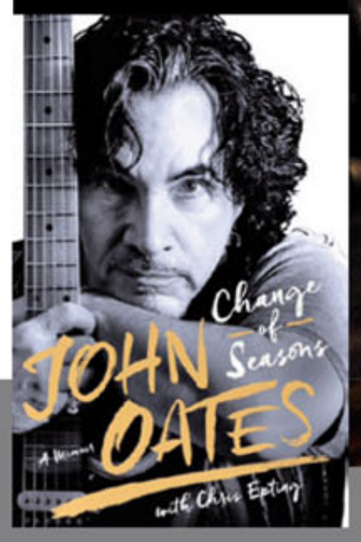
JOHN OATES REVEALS THE FORCES

that move him—literally and figuratively—in his captivating autobiography, *Change of Seasons*.

IT'S TOO

bad that John Oates didn't release his autobiography, *Change of Seasons*, before Dos Equis hired Augustin Legrand to replace Jonathan Goldsmith as "the most interesting man in the world." No offense to Legrand, who is a fine actor, but Oates' actual life story is much more fascinating than any scenario that a Madison Avenue account executive could ever concoct. There are numerous near-death experiences (on a motorcycle, in a car while racing professionally, and as the pilot of a private plane), celebrity encounters (David Bowie! George Harrison! Hunter S. Thompson!), love won and lost, fortunes won and lost (and won back again), and even a performance onstage with the Temptations, at the Apollo Theater no less. And don't forget that Oates boasted one of the most iconic mustaches of the Seventies and Eighties—which was no mean feat in those impressively hairy eras.

Surprises abound in *Change of Seasons*, which covers the period from Oates' formative years as a musician through the Nineties, just before he embarked on an entirely new chapter of his life as a solo artist. Perhaps the biggest surprise is that the book is not the definitive Hall and Oates story, even though Oates' experiences with the immensely popular hit-making duo were important events in his life.



Oates with a Fender Jazzmaster

BY CHRIS GILL || PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF FASANO

Oates at Stafford Speedway in 1983 while testing Brett Bodine's NASCAR Modified Pontiac racer.

"The hardest part for me was figuring out how to tell my own personal story when much of it is so inherently linked to the Hall and Oates story," Oates says. "Some of that is obviously in there, but I wanted to focus more on my own personal stories. I actually surprised myself with how many stories I had to tell. I wrote the book with Chris Epting, who started interviewing me a few years ago and who seemed to understand what I was about. I shared some stories with him, and at one point he asked if I ever considered writing a book. He encouraged me to do it, and that's how it started. After we had written about 400 pages I realized that I hadn't even reached my solo career or my move to Nashville. There wasn't enough space in this book to include that, so my plan is to do another book."

One of the most fascinating threads throughout the book is Oates' passion for cars. His interest in racing was ignited by the discovery of a box of discarded *Road & Track* magazines he found while walking in his childhood neighborhood of North Wales, Pennsylvania. "I went to a lot of races while I was growing up," he admits. "Then I started to race go-karts for a while, and that led to racing cars. As Hall and Oates became more successful, I also started collecting cars. I'm still a car fan and gearhead. I don't race anymore, but I love driving. I don't collect anymore, but I still have a few cars."

Sadly, Oates sold off his impressive car collection in 1987 after his accountant revealed the shocking news that Oates was broke due to mishandling of his band's business affairs. The collection included a 1955 Chevy Bel Air convertible, a 1956 Porsche Speedster ("the only car in the bunch I wish I still had"), a 1967 Austin-Healey 3000, a 1967 Jaguar XKE, and a custom-built 1984 Porsche Carrera that he had special ordered from the factory in Stuttgart. Cars that Oates had owned previously were equally impressive, including a fire-engine red Rolls Royce Corniche convertible and a 1977 Porsche 930 Turbo Carrera.

"That was one of the very first 930 Turbo Carreras," Oates recalls. "Allegedly, Rod Stewart had already put down a deposit on the one that I wanted—at least that is what the salesman told me. That story could be as true or false as you want it to be, although you know how car salesmen can be."

Oates remains passionate about Porsches, and he's currently putting together his ultimate Porsche. "I'm in the process of building a custom vintage Porsche Outlaw with Rod Emory of Emory Motorsports in North Hollywood, California," he says. "It's going to be entirely hand-built. We just found an old Porsche 356 in a barn in Texas that we're using as the starter car."

The "fun" cars in the garage near Oates' Nashville home include a 1972 Alfa-Romeo Spider convertible ("I've been restoring it for the past couple years, and it's completely stock") and a 2013 Audi TT RS. "It's a Final Edition TT RS that was the last model of the Series 2 TT that Audi built before they went to their new style," he says. "The color is Nimbus Grey, which is the color that Audi used on the show car back when they first introduced that model, but they hadn't offered the TT in that color until the Final Edition. They made 30 Final Editions in Nimbus Grey with a special interior and all the bells and whistles. I had it modified by APR in Alabama, who are probably the best-known Audi tuners in America. It has a Stage 2 tuning kit with a chip and a full exhaust. It puts out about 430 horsepower. It's a fun beast. When I want to get my heart beating fast, that's the one that I take out on all the great country roads here in Tennessee."

Oates also has two daily drivers: a Toyota Tacoma truck that resides at his mountain home in Woody Creek, Colorado ("I live on a dirt road out there, so basically I *need* a truck") and a Volkswagen Golf R. "The Golf is actually one of my favorite cars that I've ever driven," he admits. "I've driven everything from the most exotic vintage sports cars to modern things like the Porsche GT3, but I really love the Golf R. It's a fantastic car to drive for doing your everyday thing. Whenever I get in the car it's a really enjoyable driving experience. It's really well put together and has a lot of well-thought-out features."

In 1977, the same year that Oates bought his first Porsche, he met racecar driver Richard Lloyd. With Lloyd's help and encouragement, he signed up for racing school and eventually earned an SCCA (Sports Car Club of America) competition license. While Hall and Oates were experiencing new levels of success during the early Eighties, Oates was enjoying a second career and similar rise in success as a professional racer.

"I just progressed the way any racing driver progresses," he states. "When you start racing, it becomes pretty clear very quickly whether you have the talent and skills or not. If you get out there and you're always running in the back of the pack, you can't keep up with everybody, and you're barely qualifying, racing probably isn't what you should be doing. Every time I went to a driving school or even back when I was racing go-karts, I did pretty well. I got to the front, and while I didn't always win every race, I was always very competitive. I always felt I had some kind of talent for racing, and my times were always very competitive. When you're reinforced by success, you naturally move on. I went from go-karts to Formula 4 to Sports 2000, which is an amateur and professional series. I did a few rides in IMSA in a couple of Porsches, and I finally ended my

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN OATES

JEFF FASANO

Oates at his Nashville home with a custom Martin 000-18.

"I'M STILL A CAR FAN AND GEARHEAD. I DON'T RACE ANYMORE, BUT I LOVE DRIVING."
—JOHN OATES

career by crashing my Pontiac Fiero at Elkhart Lake.

"If I hadn't crashed I probably would have raced a little longer," he muses. "The thing is that I was racing in a professional series without giving it professional effort. I came to the realization that maybe I could get away with that at the amateur level, but not at the level that I was racing at. The combination of the crash and being more honest with myself influenced my decision to quit racing. It was crazy. I can't believe I actually went as far as I did."

While financial hardship forced Oates to sell his car collection during the late Eighties, he did manage to hang onto a few of his favorite workhorse guitars from the early days, including a 1958 Stratocaster that was his main guitar with Hall and Oates during the Seventies and Eighties. In 2012 Seymour Duncan rebuilt the guitar and restored it to the way it was in 1974, complete with it original dual-humbucking pickup (including a Gibson PAF) modification.

"That Strat and a TV Jones Model 10, which I bought as soon as that model came out [*in 2009*], are my go-to guitars onstage with Hall and Oates," he says. "The pickups have a chimey quality with a lot of clarity that is the perfect complement to what I need on certain songs."

Oates predominantly plays acoustic guitar when doing his solo shows, with his main guitar being a custom Martin 000-18. "It was built to my specs by the Martin Custom Shop," he says. "It's a very unique guitar. It's actually a 00 size, but the body is 1/2-inch deeper, and the body is rosewood and spruce instead of mahogany, which technically makes it a 00-28. I don't think that Martin has ever made another one like it, so it's probably one of a kind. It's in Martin's book of custom guitars. I had my special inlay put in it, and it's gorgeous. I also use some custom Gibsons that I spec'd out and had built at their factory in Bozeman, Montana. I have a custom L-00 and two B-25s that are actually built exactly like a J-45. Technically they're mini J-45s, but they're the size of a B-25. They're very unique guitars as well."

Other guitars in Oates' collection include various Duesenbergs, Fender Jazzmasters, a new reproduction D'Angelico New Yorker, a James Trussart Steelcaster, a Martin D-28 and an 00-15M, and a Gibson ES-390. "There's also an old Gibson ES-175, a 1967 Gretsch Single Anniversary, a Sixties Guild F-20, a Vinnie Bell Coral Sitar from the Seventies… The list goes on and on. I probably have about 20 guitars that I actually use. I'm not really a collector. I have a lot of working guitars. If I don't use it, I won't keep it. Every guitar I own has a specific use."

As *Change of Seasons* so eloquently reveals, Oates has always maintained a solid, grounded perspective on his life whether he's enjoying the heights of success or experiencing the turmoil of near disaster. In fact, he considers the financial hardship he endured in 1987 as the most positive turning point of his life.

"As negative as you could look at that situation," he explains, "the reality was that it was the best thing that ever happened to me. It caused me to change my entire life. I needed to grow up and become a different man. I took an entirely different approach to my entire life from that point forward. Had that not happened to me—say, that the Eighties had ended and I had millions and millions of dollars—who knows where I would have ended up. It was actually a blessing, and that's what I want people to take away from this book. Sure, I got ripped off, but lots of musicians got ripped off. That's a pretty common story. But I fought through it and came out a much better person on the other side." GA

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LED ZEPPED

In 1974, a Led Zeppelin–sponsored McLaren M8E/D racecar spent one impressive season on the racetrack before disappearing from history. Here is its untold story.

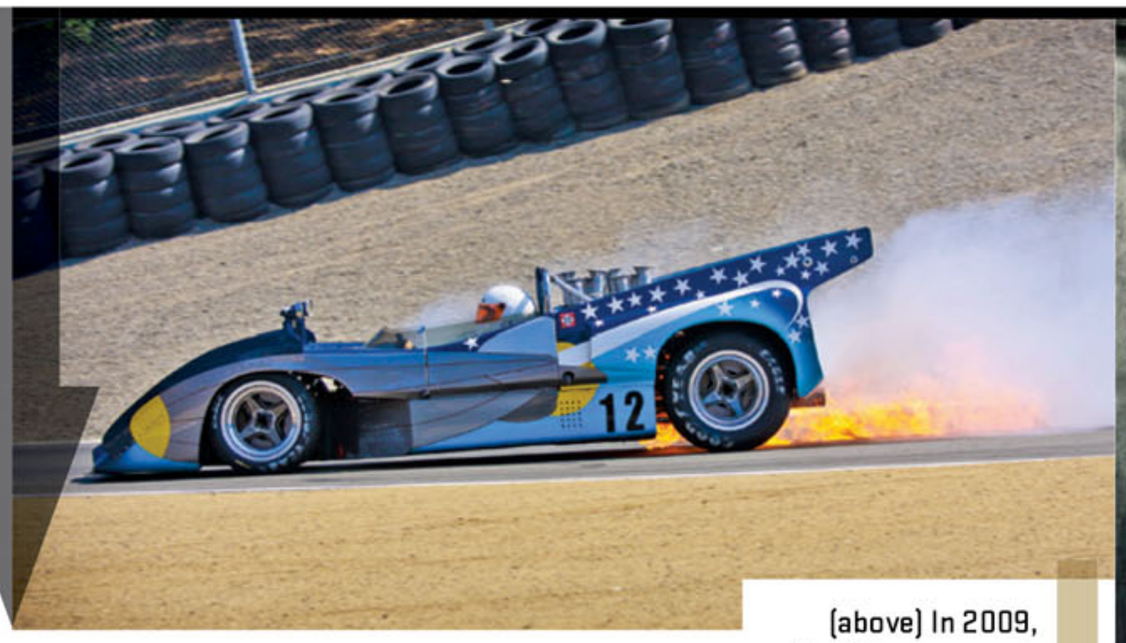
LED Zeppelin's colorful history and classic tracks have been thoroughly covered by journalists over the years. The Library of Congress has cataloged no fewer than 188 titles related to the band, including biographies, song-by-song analyses, and tell-alls of the group's legendary partying. From Stephen Davis' classic 1985 tome *Hammer of the Gods* to Brad Tolinski's 2012 *Light and Shade* oral biography of guitarist Jimmy Page, it would seem that every aspect of the group's existence has been scrutinized and documented.

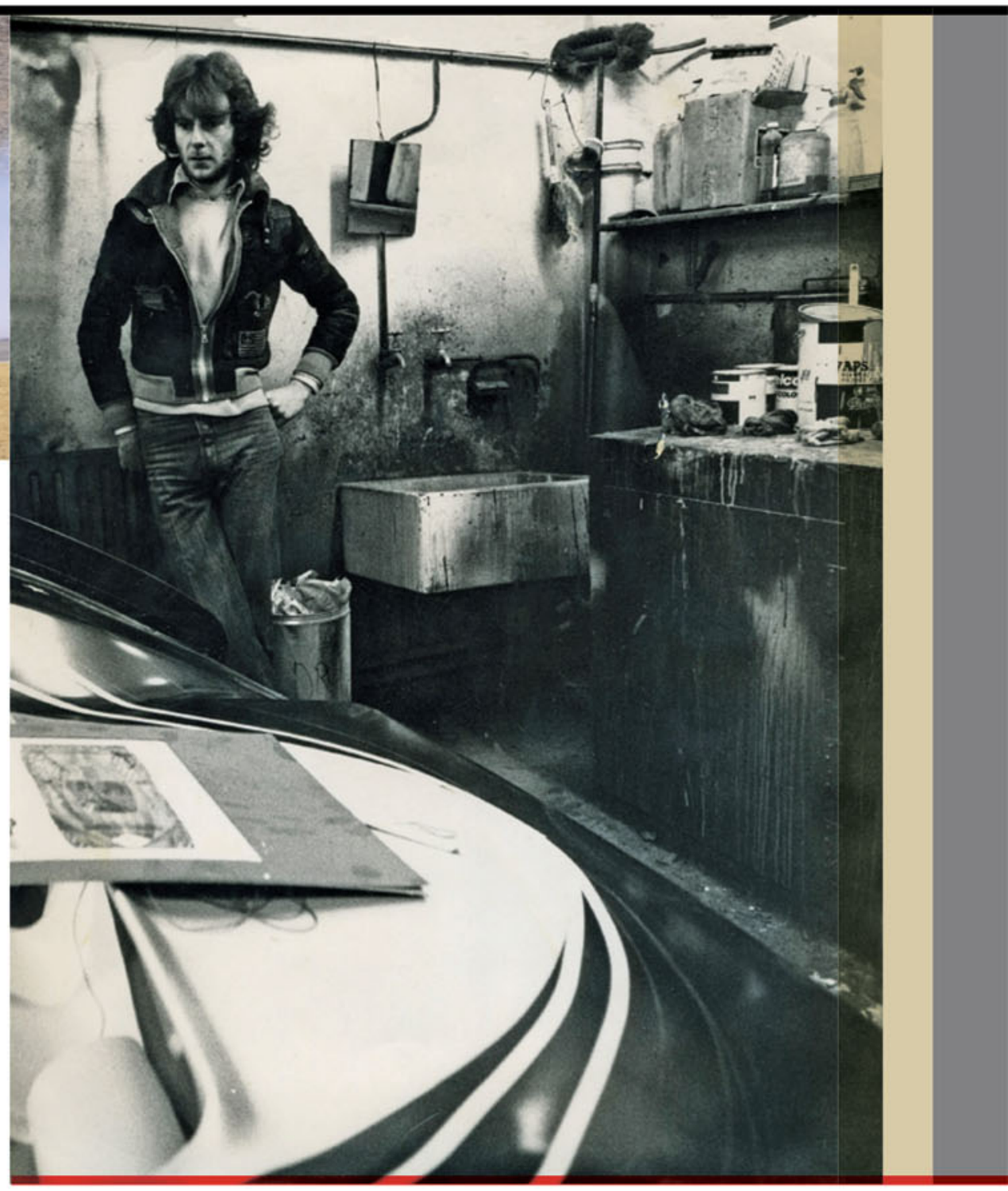
So to encounter a large piece of Led Zeppelin paraphernalia that has somehow eluded the standard narrative is somewhat like stumbling on an extra Dead Sea Scroll or a lost da Vinci. Such is the epiphany offered by a stroll through the paddock at the Monterey Historic Races in Laguna Seca, California, each year. Among the various Ferraris, Trans-Am Camaros, and Lolas sits a 1971 McLaren M8E/D with a Led Zeppelin airship balloon painted on each fender and the nose. According to a sign sitting beside the imposing Can-Am racecar, it was sponsored by the group during the 1974 season—which will probably come as news even to diehard Zeppelin fans.

As most Led Zeppelin histories will tell you, after touring extensively for several years in the early Seventies, the group crashed hard in England in fall 1973. In the year to come, during which Led Zeppelin would take more time off than they ever had before, they released their 1973 concert film, *The Song Remains the Same*, and founded their own boutique label, Swan Song records. Both of these achievements were largely attributable to the tireless efforts of Peter Grant, the group's shrewd and ruthless bear-like manager who built the mold for guys like Suge Knight.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JULES MORITZ III

BY MIKE DALY





(above) In 2009, the McLaren nearly caught fire in an engine blowout. (right) Richard Evans in 1973 with the McLaren and his concept drawings.

It was around this same time that Grant invited Led Zeppelin to attend a cocktail party at the Playboy Club in London, where they were to meet a racecar driver named Kaye Griffiths. A Brit who campaigned in the Interserie, Europe's version of Can-Am (the unlimited engine-displacement series that fielded history's most powerful racecars), Griffiths had recently purchased a used McLaren M8E that was factory-converted to M8D-style bodywork. His would-be manager and friend, a photographer named Zelma Wilkins, was actively seeking a rock-band sponsorship to put Griffiths on the map. While on their way to a race at Hockenheim, Germany, in September, she and Griffiths took a meeting with the Rolling Stones. In the end, though, Grant—always looking for unique ways to market Led Zeppelin— was the interested taker.

A deal was cut, and by late 1973 Griffiths' McLaren was in a paint shop in London receiving a custom design from Richard Evans, a designer from Hipgnosis, the art firm that created countless classic-era album covers, including several for Pink Floyd. The project was the perfect cap to what proved to be a banner year for the company, which also saw the release of Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* and Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy*, both featuring Hipgnosis cover art.

"The McLaren was just one of many jobs that Led Zeppelin and their record company, Swan Song, gave Hipgnosis," recalls Evans, now the head of his own design firm. "If I remember correctly, I did three completely different concepts for the car, and I produced very detailed air-brushed illustrations with side, back, and front views of the car, plus a top view. I first presented the ideas to Peter Grant. Later, I showed the ideas to [*Led Zeppelin drummer*] John Bonham, who loved the design.

"Once I completed the design, I oversaw the painting in a body shop in Regent's Park, London. The shop only worked on very special cars for the rich and wealthy. It was in a mews in a smart part of London near Abbey Road Studios. I remember there were two other cars there at the same time: a Facel Vega belonging to Ringo Starr and a Ford Popular that had been customized for Paul McCartney."

In January 1974, the repainted McLaren made its public debut at a rather unusual auto show called the Evening News Motor Racing Showboat, so named because it was held on a ferry moored next to a battleship on the Thames. Period film clips of the show, now posted on YouTube, are among the only remaining documents of this unique intersection between Led Zeppelin and automotive culture.

Griffiths went on to do quite well in the Led Zeppelin–sponsored M8E/D. Its huge 500-cubic-inch engine (good for nearly 700 horsepower) propelled him to several podium finishes at the famed Silverstone track during the first half of 1974. Then, for reasons that aren't entirely clear, he sold the car, and the unusual sponsorship was over. The Led Zeppelin McLaren made its way to a fresh chain of owners, one of whom quickly repainted it in McLaren orange.

During the Nineties, an owner restored the Led Zeppelin paint livery, and the car was later purchased in 2002 by Jules Moritz, Jr., a longtime fan of Can-Am racing who had dreamed of someday running one of the powerful machines, himself. Moritz restored the McLaren to racing condition and entered it at vintage events in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, usually with his son, Jules III, in tow. Both men were mechanical engineers. Having turned a wrench since he could walk, the younger Moritz, now in his fifties, would work on the car while his father schmoozed passers-by and let kids sit in the cockpit. It became one of those father-son bonding rites worthy of a Hollywood script.

After the elder Moritz passed away in 2012, Jules Moritz III continued to run the Led Zeppelin McLaren in his father's memory. He says the M8E is one of approximately 10 customer cars originally built and the only one converted to D-style bodywork. During a 2009 engine blowout, the car nearly caught fire. Such incidents illustrate the quandary facing any owner of a valuable historic racecar who actually wants to put in on a track.

"Dad always believed that racecars should be raced, and I agree," Moritz says, with a chuckle. "But this car definitely challenges my ability to not think about how much it's worth when I'm out there on the track." GA

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Savings and Loan

WHEN A LEGENDARY GUITAR SHOP WENT UP IN SMOKE, AN ACT OF GENEROSITY SAVED AN EXTRAORDINARY GIBSON STYLE U HARP GUITAR.

{ *BY FLIP SCIPIO* }

ONCE UPON A TIME, along a canal in one of Amsterdam's oldest sections, there was a guitar store that had gained an almost legendary reputation: Søren Venema's Palm Guitars. The tiny subterranean space was crammed with an abundance of desirable stringed instruments. In addition to myriad vintage guitars, banjos, resophonic instruments, and mandolins, one could encounter a Greek-Armenian oud, a chumbush, a Balkan zither, a Turkish Divan saz, or an ivory flute played possibly by Alexander von Humboldt on an Ecuadorian mountain slope. It might have been the only place in the Benelux where such an item could be found in a playable condition.

Palm Guitars was on my list of haunts whenever I'd hang out in Amsterdam, and three years ago I walked in with the usual care where I placed my feet. I quietly sat down on an amplifier and waited for Søren to appear from behind the ancient showcase full of cheap noncollectibles like a Bigsby beer coaster, an I.O.U. signed by Lloyd Loar, and first-year-issue Gibson ABR bridges, made extra thin to compensate for the shallow ES-335 neck sets. As it happened, there was a third person in the shop that day, a rail-thin man dressed in black and enveloped in a chain-smoker's aura. He was holding something that looked like an early Gibson black-faced Style U harp guitar, but where the long harp-string extension should have been was a small headstock taken from a bandura, a Ukrainian zither harp. The dozen harp strings were held at one end by autoharp tuners and connected to an integrated bridge and tailpiece that allowed them to be individually tuned.

The man in black turned out to be Søren's repairman, Thomas Grabinger, who had just completed the conversion. I was marveling over the ingenuity of the design and its lovely execution when, quite unusually, a green monster awoke in me and started its downward spiral of greed. To hide my sudden desire for the Gibson, I began to play it, only to realize it had the same effect on me that handling two of Linda Manzer's Pikasso guitars had: These wonderful instruments seem to play themselves—all you have to do is pluck the strings and follow.

I should have said, "I want it. How much?" What came out instead was, "You know, this would really be something for Shahzad. Have you seen him lately?" Shahzad is Shahzad Ismaily, an unusually gifted world musician who plays a lot of different instruments with equal ease and soulfulness. Besides being the bassist with Marc Ribot's Ceramic Dog, Shahzad owns and operates Figure 8 Recording in Brooklyn and wears his instruments like an Inuit wears his furs. He plays all over the world. Meanwhile, I had established the one valid excuse I had not to purchase the Gibson: It didn't have a case but rather a soft brown fake-leather bag made for a cello, with a suspicious-looking zipper. There was no way for me to get this behemoth back safely to the U.S.

Søren answered that he had not seen Shahzad but thinking of him was a good and valid idea. I got lost playing the Gibson harp guitar for a while, said my good byes to it, and avoided looking at a Davoli bass, though I did buy a single-pickup Japanese baby electric guitar with four strings and two broken tuners.

Six or seven months later, I was back in New York, whittling something in my Brooklyn shop, when I heard that an Amsterdam guitar shop had burned down. To my dismay, it was Palm Guitars. Whatever wasn't burnt to a vintage crisp was given a big drink of water by the fire brigade. I couldn't help thinking about that beautiful demented Gibson harp guitar, saved from the scrap heap by an inventive artist only to be denied its ninth life by a fire. Somehow, Søren took the disaster in stride and continued his business in his house, 20 minutes outside of the Amsterdam Central Station.

A few months after I learned of the tragedy, I received a phone call from Shahzad, who was in town and wanted me to look at a few instruments: a P-Bass, an acoustic guitar, and a very strange old harp guitar.

"That wouldn't possibly be a black-faced Gibson U harp guitar," I said half jokingly. "Why, yes," he replied. "How did you know that?"

One week after my encounter with the guitar, Shahzad had stopped into Palm Guitars. He wanted the Gibson instantaneously but balked at the heavy price tag. Since he was in Amsterdam for a recording session, he inquired whether he could borrow it for the session and return it afterward. Søren loaned him the instrument, and Shahzad still had it when the fire broke out.

Thanks to Søren's generosity, the Gibson was the only instrument to make it out of the shop alive. GA

(Thanks to Søren Venema and Shahzad Ismaily.)

Flip Scipio makes and repairs guitars in Brooklyn, New York. Visit his website, flipscipio.com.

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DISCOVERING THE WONDERFUL WINES OF ALSACE.

{ BY CHRIS GILL, CWAS }

ALSACE IS AN ANOMALY compared to the other wine-producing regions of France in numerous ways. For example, Alsace is the only AOC (*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*) region that is allowed to identify and label its wines by varietal instead of appellation. The grapes cultivated in Alsace are predominantly varietals like Riesling and Gewürztraminer, associated with Germany and Austria rather than the traditional French varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Syrah. Alsace is also the only region in France that requires producers to use a specific type of bottle, in this case the narrow, elongated flute-shaped and green-colored variety. But although the Alsace region has been ruled by Germany during several historical periods, its wines have their own distinct and unique character that sets them apart from their German counterparts.

The region is located in the northeastern corner of France, bordered by the Vosges mountain range to the west and the Rhine river to the east. Most of the vineyards are planted in the foothills of the Vosges mountains and the flat lands and rolling foothills along the western edges of the valley that runs north to south for about 75 miles, roughly from the major city hubs of Strasbourg to Mulhouse. The Routes des Vins d'Alsace is a 105-mile route that winds through 67 villages and communes, including numerous immaculately preserved medieval villages like Kaysersberg, Obernai, Riquewihr, and Ribeauville, where a walk down the cobblestone streets is like going back in time. The variations in soil composition in the area are staggering, and include chalk, clay, granite, limestone, sandstone, schist, and volcanic material.

More than 2,000 vintners produce wine in the area, although about 150 wineries account for more than 75 percent of the region's total output. The best-known producers include Léon Beyer, Hugel & Fils, Josmeyer, Trimbach, Weinbach, and Zind-Humbrecht. Most Alsace wineries, including the biggest names, are independent family-owned operations.

In addition to Riesling and Gewürztraminer, Alsace also produces great Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, and Muscat wines. Red wine production is almost exclusively Pinot Noir, which accounts for less than 10 percent of the wines produced in Alsace. Some of the most highly acclaimed Alsatian wines are its sweet Sélections de Grains Nobles (SGN) and late-harvest Vendange Tardive (VT) wines, which are made from Gewürztraminer, Muscat, Pinot Gris, or Riesling grapes. Wines designated "Grand Cru" are produced from the region's best vineyards and generally are among the region's finest offerings (particularly from the well-known producers), although there are some exceptions. Alsace also produces a variety of excellent sparkling Crèmant wines that are very reasonably priced and quite enjoyable.

CHRIS GILL

My personal favorites are dry Rieslings produced by three of Alsace's biggest producers—Hugel, Trimbach, and Zind-Humbrecht—as well as the wines of Domaine Ostertag, which is one of a handful of biodynamic wine producers in the region along with Zind-Humbrecht. Some of my choices include Hugel's Grossi Laüe, Trimbach's legendary Clos Ste. Hune and Cuvée Frédéric Emile, and Zind-Humbrecht's Brand, Herrenweg de Turckheim, Clos Windsbuhl, and Rangen de Thann Clos Saint Urbain. Zind-Humbrecht's SGN Pinot Gris wines from Clos Jebsal, Clos Saint Urbain, or Clos Windsbuhl, are exquisite and are among the world's all-time greatest sweet wines.

While most of the red Pinot Noir wine produced in Alsace seems destined for use as the base for vin chaud sold at the lively Christmas markets across the region during the holidays, the quality of Alsace Pinot Noir has improved significantly in recent years, and a few even rival good Burgundies. The sommelier at L'Auberge de L'ill (a three-star Michelin restaurant that is a must-visit when touring the Alsace region) recommended the 2012 Albert Mann Clos de la Faille, which possesses a floral nose with just a hint of barnyard and a refreshing red fruit palate. The wine was good enough to inspire me to seek out the Grand Cru old-vine Grand H and Grand P Pinot Noir wines from this biodynamic producer.

Dry Alsatian white wines are a perfect match for Alsatian dishes like tarte flambée, choucroute, and baeckeoffe as well as rich Munster, Raclette, and Comté cheeses, while the off-dry and sweet wines pair well with foie gras as well as Thai and spicy Chinese cuisine. Crémant d'Alsace even goes well with fried chicken. Alsace's "entry-level" varietals are great values and affordable enough to enjoy every weekend, while the region's best wines are appropriate for any of life's most special occasions. GA

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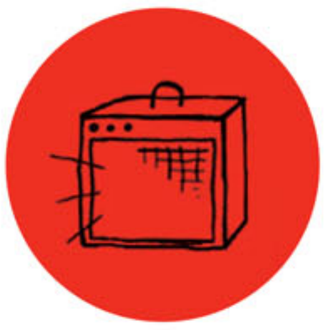

Charlie's Angels

THE HEAVENLY SOUNDS OF BRITISH WATKINS AMPS.

{ *BY MITCH COLBY* }

AMONG PLAYERS WHO appreciate British EL84-based guitar amps, the first brand that usually comes to mind is Vox. However, the British produced a wide variety of great (and even a few famous) EL84 amps, including the Marshall 18-watt combo and its brother, the 20-watt head. The EL84 tube (or "valve," as the British would say) was as common in the U.K. as the 6V6 was in the United States. A large percentage of U.S.-built small amps used one or two 6V6s, while in the U.K. the EL84 was employed. And since the EL84 was so commonly available, several powerful amps were built with four EL84s, the most famous of which is the Vox AC30.

In my opinion, beyond Vox and Marshall, the best EL84 vintage amps were made by Watkins, a very early and popular U.K. amp brand from the Fifties and Sixties. Charlie Watkins, the company's founder, was designing, building, and selling amps long before Vox and Marshall were. He was also famous for the Watkins Copicat tape echo and for developing some of the first stadium-sized P.A. systems in the late Sixties and Seventies.

Many Watkins amps are now collectible because they sound great, especially if you like small amps that sound incredible in the recording studio and that you can crank up without annoying the neighbors. The most collectible Watkins amp is the late-Fifties-to-early-Sixties V-front, two-tone Dominator, with twin Elac 10-inch speakers and 17 watts of EL84 power. Its creamy overdrive is a wonderful thing, and it was the secret weapon of many classic British rock recording sessions. The Marshall 18-watt combo is without question a copy of this amp.

The Dominator went through a number of iterations over the years. I've seen them with at least three different speaker types, and the earliest ones didn't have tremolo. The later WEM Dominator design was changed to an all-black cabinet with a striking patterned grille, but the circuit was changed as well, so these latter-day Dominators are very different amps.

Watkins also offered a variety of smaller combos, including the Clubman, which has an eight-inch Elac speaker and a single EL84 putting out five watts. The Westminster, which started production in 1954, generally had a 10-inch Elac speaker and two ECL82s to deliver about 10 watts, although some variants had a pair of EL84s, including the two-channel versions of the Westminster. It's a great sounding amp! The first Dominators were actually two-channel Westminsters housed in V-front cabinets with two 10-inch speakers. Watkins also offered a 14-watt, single-speaker version of the Dominator called the Scout. This awesome, very special amplifier has the same exact circuit as the V-front Westminster/Dominator but was produced for only a few years during the early Sixties.

The absolute king of all Watkins amps is the Joker, which sports four EL84s to deliver 30 watts, and features one 12-inch hi-fi speaker, a hi-fi horn, a built-in Copicat tape echo, and a built-in mic stand. These are extremely rare and collectible. A Watkins Joker in good cosmetic and working condition can sell in the $10,000-plus range. Keith Richards has been using a Watkins Joker onstage with the Rolling Stones during recent tours, if that tells you anything about who can afford them.

Around 1963 or 1964, Watkins changed its name to WEM (for "Watkins Electric Music") and also began using different amp circuits. The biggest change was from a single tone control to individual treble and bass controls. These later amps sound pretty good, but they don't quite have the balls and raw tone of the earlier Watkins amps. They also don't look nearly as cool, although in 1964 the two-tone amps certainly must have looked dated. Through the Sixties and Seventies, Watkins continued to produce and offer more amp models, including heads and cabinets, but by the Seventies most of Watkins' business was devoted to producing P.A. systems.

You can discover more information about Watkins at vintagehofner.co.uk/britamps/Watkins.html and wemwatkins.co.uk. GA

Mitch Colby helped develop many Marshall and Vox amp designs and is the founder of Colby Amplification.

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A Different Kind of Tube

EVH 5150 IIIS EL34 100-watt amp head and 4x12 speaker cabinet

BY CHRIS GILL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

ED VAN HALEN kicked off his new EVH brand in a spectacular fashion almost exactly 10 years ago with the introduction of its first product: the 5150 III 100-watt amplifier. Since then, the brand has grown to offer an impressive variety of guitars, amps, and accessories. Along the way, Ed made a few tweaks to the 5150 III head to satisfy his needs when performing on tour, and these were manifested in the 5150 IIIS amplifier. But the biggest surprise came two years ago when Ed announced that EVH would be offering an EL34-powered 5150 head based on the sounds of the legendary 1968 Marshall Super Lead amp that he used to record Van Halen's first six albums.

After taking the prototype on tour in 2015 and making a few more tweaks at home in his studio, Van Halen has finally introduced the EVH 5150 IIIS EL34 amp. Featuring the same signature striped motif as the previous 5150 III heads but in a dazzling black-and-gold color scheme, the amp shares the same control configuration and functional design as the 5150 IIIS, but it has its own distinct tonal character thanks to an entirely redesigned circuit featuring four EL34 power tubes. Fans of Ed's classic Van Halen tones will certainly be satisfied, but so will those who have come to love the modern versatility of EVH's 5150 III amps, which have become fixtures on concert stages, where they are used by everyone from modern metal guitarists to hard-rockin' country acts.

The EL34 amp features the same three-channel 100-watt design (clean/crunch, distortion, and high-gain), with each channel providing its own volume, gain, low, mid, high, presence, and resonance controls to deliver the performance of three fully independent amps in a single chassis. The head also includes an effect loop, 1/4-inch preamp out, external bias adjustment with test points, two 1/4-inch speaker outputs, and a durable pro-quality footswitch controller for selecting channels and the effect loop. The matching 5150 IIIS EL34 4x12 speaker cabinet is loaded with the same signature Celestion G12EVH 12-inch speakers and has the same angled baffle and solid birch construction as previous EVH 5150 4x12 cabinets, but its color scheme is black with gold badges to match the EL34 head.

Ever since February 10, 1978, when KGB played Van Halen's debut album in its entirety, I've been obsessed with Eddie Van Halen's tone. Over the years I've collected Plexi Marshall heads and experimented with Variacs and various modifications, and I've tried products from dozens of boutique amp builders that all proclaim to have "the tone." As close as many of these products and configurations have come, none have nailed the unmistakable tonal personality of Ed's guitar tone on the early Van Halen albums as perfectly as the 5150 IIIS EL34. There's a distinctive glassiness and crispness in the upper midrange where picking articulation has razor-sharp definition, yet there is plenty of balls and body in the lower midrange as well. Where most amps can get one or the other right, this amp excels at both of those attributes.

The second, or "blue," channel (corresponding LED colors for each channel are green: clean, blue: distortion, and red: high-gain) is where Ed's classic tone resides, but this channel can provide even more gain to produce tones that are more impressively aggressive. The EL34's green channel delivers clean tones that sound more crisp and shimmering than the thicker Fender-like tones of the previous 5150 III and IIIS amps (which have 6L6 tubes), with a distinctive British character that is almost like a Vox. The high-gain red channel can produce bone-crunching modern metal rhythm tones, but it can also sing sweetly with smooth, compressed midrange and infinite sustain that is perfect for solos.

One characteristic that I particularly like about the EL34 version of the 5150 IIIS is that the overall tonal character of the three channels is matched better, allowing for seamless, smooth transitions from one channel to the next. Unlike many 100-watt heads that really only sound good when cranked up well past the halfway point, the 5150 IIIS EL34 sounds great at lower volume levels. As the volume and gain are turned up, the amp becomes more and more of a fire-breathing beast, but even at its most aggressive levels of gain the note definition and articulation always remain clear, delivering every nuance of the player's picking technique. GA

LIST PRICE: $3,294.43 (amp head), $1,333.32 (cabinet)
EVH Gear, evhgear.com

TALKIN' 'BOUT TONE Edward Van Halen reveals the motivations behind the EVH 5150 IIIS EL34.

What inspired you to develop an amp head with EL34 tubes, particularly since you now prefer 6L6 tubes in your main 5150 IIIS?
Well, I preferred EL34 tubes way before I started using 6L6s. I love them both now, to tell you the truth, but they have different personalities and character. I've always wanted an EL34 amp that was hotter than the original Marshall. I always wanted more out of my original Marshall. What we ended up with is the best EL34 amp I have ever played through.

Who is the ideal customer/player for the EVH 5150 IIIS EL34 amp?
Anyone who plays electric guitar and wants a great-sounding amp! I would own one even if it wasn't an EVH.

What are the biggest differences sonically between the EL34 head and the previous 5150 IIIS?
The essence and the nature of EL34 sound is just different. It has a completely unique and unmistakable individual character, in the same way 6L6s do their own thing. The overtones and attack of an EL34 cannot be replicated by anything else. It's hard to put into words, like trying to describe to a blind person what color is. Using them together [*an EL34 IIIS and a 6L6 IIIS*] in a stereo amp rig setup sounds totally fucking insane!

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GAIN
LOW
MID
HIGH
VOLUME
PRESENCE
ONE
TWO
THREE
EVH
5150 III S EL34

Weekday Warrior

2017 Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT

BY MIKE DALY

CONNOISSEURS OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORY often wax rhapsodically about the racing triumphs of marques like Ferrari, Porsche, and Alfa Romeo. But if such competition histories were measured in terms of sheer significance, few automakers could compare to Jeep. After all, the original Willys-Overland Jeep was the winner of a U.S. government contract to provide the best all-around utility vehicle for American soldiers, entering production in 1942 after beating out entries from Ford and American Bantam. The car that people now associate with weekend adrenaline junkies and soccer moms actually cut its teeth helping to mow down Nazis. And let's face it: The 24 Hours of Le Mans, while grueling, is nothing compared to the rigors of D-Day.

Ever since that strong debut, Jeep has proficiently built rugged off-road vehicles, but the company has never been known for challenging the luxury performance SUV market currently dominated by European outfits like BMW and Audi. That perception may soon change with a new Grand Cherokee lineup launched in late 2015. Among trim lines named Laredo, Overland, and Trailhawk, one flagship Grand Cherokee presides above them all: the SRT (Street & Racing Technology). Enthusiasts will already be familiar with the Chrysler competition nomenclature that has long decorated many of the brand's performance variants. We relished a weeklong opportunity to test the 2017 Grand Cherokee SRT, and it's difficult to recall such a deft combination of power, pamper, and polish.

There's no design brief or press release stating it outright, but it's obvious the Grand Cherokee SRT is envisioned as the ultimate street Jeep. The clearest evidence is found in the powertrain programming, which lacks editable 4x4 functions like most other Jeeps but instead includes a full track package complete with launch control, adjustable suspension and engine attributes, and lap timers that measure 0–60 mph, 0–100 mph, quarter miles, and braking distances.

And what in God's name would prompt one to put a Jeep on a track for some version of hot laps? Pop the SRT's hood and you'll find the answer in a 6.4-liter Chrysler V-8 with an aluminum-alloy head famously shaped in a hemispherical chamber. Or as the ads

Jeep envisioned the Grand Cherokee SRT as the ultimate street Jeep.

used to say, "It's a Hemi"—which kind of makes the Grand Cherokee SRT feel like a Challenger crossbred with a M1 Abrams tank. The venerable hemi engine develops 475 horsepower and 470 pound-feet of torque, taking the SRT from 0 to 60 mph in just 4.8 seconds, with a top speed of 160 mph. With a classic American V-8 thrum resonating through dual chrome-tipped exhaust pipes, the motor requires just a stab of the accelerator to pounce in traffic, sometimes even surprising fellow drivers with how quickly the big car gets where it's going.

Stopping so much mass at such velocity is no simple matter, so Jeep went all the way to the top, sourcing red-painted Brembos with 15-inch rotors up front, 13.8-inch discs in the rear, and six-piston calipers all around. An optional $1,295 high-performance brake package adds directionally slotted two-piece aluminum performance discs for even better anchoring. Performance nods continue with a rear electronic limited-slip differential and wheel-mounted paddle shifters for actuating a torque converter–based ZF automatic eight-speed transmission.

But performance is just part of the Grand Cherokee SRT's game. In addition to a meaty four-grip leather-stitched SRT-badged steering wheel and two-tone leather/alcantara multiway adjustable seats, our test car was optioned with a $1,995 Harman Kardon 825-watt, 19-speaker premium sound system and an identically priced rear entertainment package with DVD player and headrest monitors (including RCA, HDMI, and SD card inputs), making the SRT a luxury cruiser of the highest proportion. The suspension is remarkably smooth even for an American SUV, with smart dampers and an intelligent stability system that mimics the attenuation of European GT cars. And our test car's optional $2,095 dual-pane panoramic sunroof leant it first-class appeal and really opened up the cabin.

An average day of use may best illustrate the Jeep's impressive versatility. Parents schlepping their kids off to daycare in the morning will love the entertainment system, which can entrance little ones with their favorite DVD. The Grand Cherokee's height and luxury make traffic a far more bearable reality for the driver, too, providing great vision, quiet power, and ultimate comfort. It is a car to be used around town, if nothing else.

But if one can manage to steer through the gridlock to a local switchback, a flip into Sport mode is all that's required to transform the cruiser into a powerful curve hugger, as our test car amply proved on the hairpins of Mulholland Drive. Even without a full off-road package, it was impossible to resist the lure of an otherwise off-limits fire road that extends to Mulholland's western reaches, where the STR unwittingly defied local ordinances for several hundred yards of exploring.

Point being, the Grand Cherokee SRT functions beautifully as a family car, comfortable commuter, off-road explorer of sorts, and best of all, a damned fast, extremely well-balanced SUV for attacking your favorite motoring byways. With its unique low-riding bumper fascia pocked with sporty vents, the SRT also gets a surprising amount of attention, even drawing a compliment from a Beverly Hills parking attendant for our test car's unusual Red Velvet Pearl paint. You can bet that old woman's seen some pretty unusual rides, so to go out of her way to point out such a detail spoke volumes about the SRT's presentation.

Today's Army Rangers and Deltas ride armored Hummers and Bradley carriers into battle, relegating the iconic Jeep to consumers like you and me. But after living in the Grand Cherokee SRT for a week, I'd venture to say they may want to reconsider. GA

MSRP: Base, $66,795; as tested, $78,355

Jeep, jeep.com

12-Fret Program

Taylor Guitars 812ce 12-Fret DLX

BY PAUL RIARIO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MASSIMO GAMMACURTA

AS SOMEONE WHO endeavors to improve the sound and feel of acoustic instruments, you could say Taylor Guitars' Andy Powers is a dedicated and earnest luthier. In addition to assuming the prestigious role as the company's chief master guitar designer a few years ago, Powers has been busy redesigning and attentively revoicing nearly all of Taylor's most popular models, including its 400, 600, and 700 series of acoustics and 12-strings, as well as introducing a bevy of superb 12-fret models into which he breathed new life.

Without missing a beat, Powers has now harnessed his unbridled creativity to merge the finest attributes of Taylor's flagship 800 and 900 series into an exclusive set of acoustics named the 800 Deluxe Series. Of the three models that comprise the series, I took a look at my personal favorite of the bunch, the Taylor 812ce 12-Fret DLX.

Not to be confused with Taylor's 800 series 812ce 12-Fret, the 12-Fret DLX features the same tried-and-true tonal sweetness that comes from combining a Sitka spruce top with Indian rosewood back and sides. But what primarily distinguishes it as the 12-Fret DLX is a sleekly contoured and rounded-radius armrest with maple binding and a rosewood-insert veneer.

Craftsmanship throughout the guitar is top notch, and its appointments—from its maple binding to the mother-of-pearl Element inlays on its ebony fretboard—are stunning. But the player-friendly armrest really is a nice touch, mostly because it provides an additional degree of comfort and intimacy. Due to the unique geometry of its design, the 12-Fret hugs your body. The purpose of the armrest is to alleviate any stress near your forearm, which is crucial when playing fingerstyle. Moreover, the slightly shorter 24 7/8–inch scale offers supple string tension while adding even more sustain. Another premium feature is the inclusion of Gotoh 510 tuners adorning the beautiful slotted headstock, which provide an extra level of tuning precision. And for live performance, Taylor's Expression System 2 electronics perfectly captures all of the 12-Fret DLX's nuanced acoustic tone with uncomplicated ease.

The 12-Fret DLX has a rich, full-bodied acoustic voice that belies its Grand Concert size. Its projection is rather punchy and balanced across the frequency spectrum, which makes its warm tone incredibly resonant. Without getting too deep into the architectural secret sauce of why the guitar sounds so vibrant, it's obvious that a lot of thought went into Powers' experimentation, which included working with customized wood thicknesses, employing Adirondack spruce for its advanced performance bracing, infusing protein glues, and applying an ultrathin gloss finish. The result is a dynamic-sounding 12-Fret acoustic that's powerfully responsive to the touch. GA

LIST PRICE: $5,298

Taylor Guitars, taylorguitars.com

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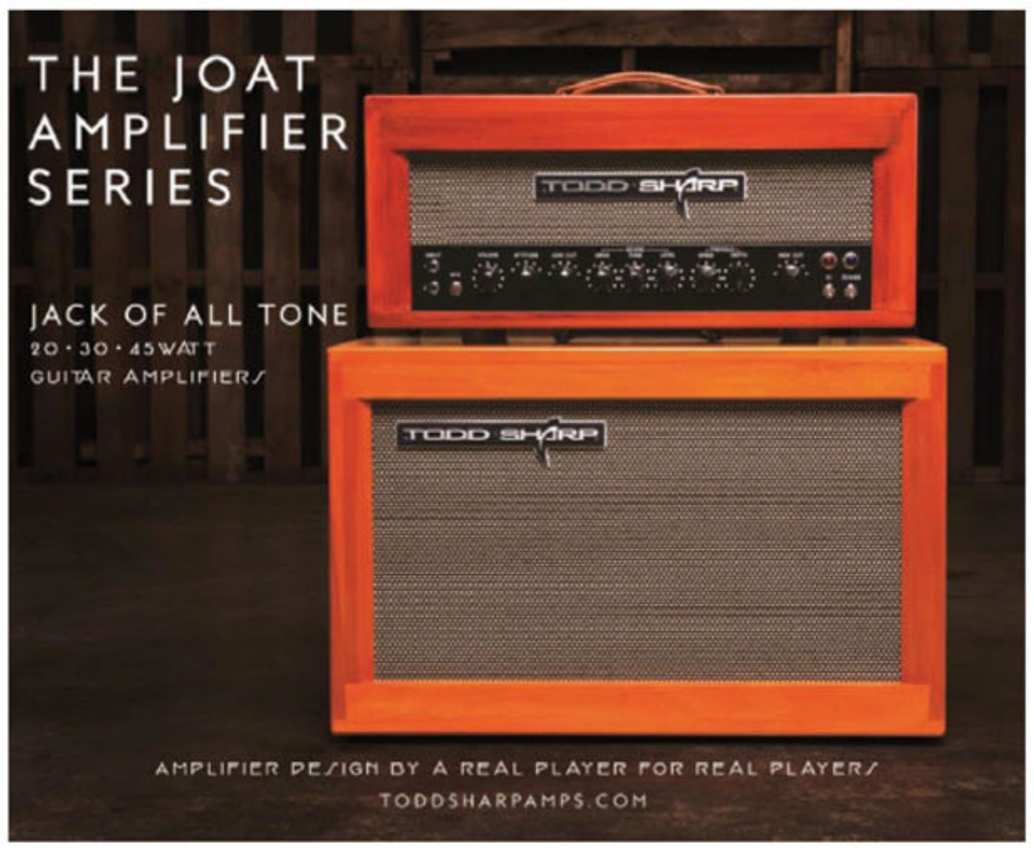

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Riding High

FOR REGGAE'S GREATEST ICON, *BMW* STOOD FOR "BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS."

IN 1976, PHOTOGRAPHER Peter Simon and writer Stephen Davis were dispatched to Jamaica to chronicle the burgeoning reggae scene then revolutionizing popular music. The result would be the seminal book *Reggae Bloodlines*, which gave many readers their first introduction to the culture and message of reggae music. While not included in the book, this iconic image of reggae's foremost performer, Bob Marley, and his BMW 2002 was one of the photos to emerge from Simon and Davis's journey of discovery.

Simon had photographed the Grateful Dead, Led Zeppelin, Bruce Springsteen, Aretha Franklin, and many other musical celebrities for outlets including *Rolling Stone, Time, Newsweek*, and the *Village Voice*. But this assignment was something new for him.

"I'd never been to a third-world country," he says. "We went for six weeks. And because we were friendly with Bob Marley's PR guy, he set up an interview with Bob for us. We met with a lot of reggae artists—Burning Spear, Jimmy Cliff, the Mighty Diamonds, and many others—but Bob was obviously Numero Uno."

The encounter took place at Marley's home at 56 Hope Road in Kingston. Simon was allowed to shoot during Davis's interview with Marley, but as it began to get dark, the photographer asked if he could take some outdoor shots. "Bob lit up a spliff and shared it with us," Simon recalls, "which was unusual for me. I usually don't do that. So I got pretty high. And parked in front of 56 Hope Road was this BMW."

Using a Nikon camera, Simon got to work. "I posed him in front of the car," he said. "It was dark, so I really had to push the film to get a decent amount of density." At one point in the shoot, he recalls, "I asked Bob why he liked BMWs as opposed to other cars. And he said, 'What's that spell, mon? It's *BMW*—Bob Marley and the Wailers!'"

Simon photographed Marley on several other occasions, both in concert and more intimate settings. But he says the BMW shots—signed prints of which are available with other Simon photos at petersimon.com and rockpaperphoto.com—are among his most popular and best selling of all time. "Of all the people I've photographed," he says, "Bob Marley has gotta be up there in the top 10." *—Alan di Perna*

Signed, limited-edition prints of this photo—and additional images by Peter Simon—are available from rockpaperphoto.com.

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